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#FLAWLESS: The Intersection of Celebrity Culture and New Media in the Modern Feminist Movement

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**#FLAWLESS: THE INTERSECTION OF CELEBRITY CULTURE AND
NEW MEDIA IN THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT**

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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PROFESSOR ANDREJEVIC
PROFESSOR GEISMER**

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To the brave storytellers out there—thank you for believing in your voice and sharing it with the world.

To all of the people in my life who have instilled in me a profound belief in my own brave story (my parents—Ron and Susan Schwartz, my brother—Zach Schwartz, my family, my friends, my teachers and my mentors, Mounds Park Academy and Scripps College, anyone who as ever watched one of my movies since I was 12-years-old) thank you for supporting me day in and day out in this beautiful life.

And, finally, to Scripps College and the Intercollegiate American Studies department (especially Professor Julie Liss, Professor Mark Andrejevic, Professor Lily Geismer and Professor Rita Roberts) thank you for opening my eyes to the world and for helping me see the stories that are so often invisible.

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"I'm going to say something. And, I may be preaching to the choir, but I am going to say it anyway not just for us but because I know on Monday people are going to click on a link to find out what the lady from Scandal said at that awards show... I play characters that belong to segments of society that are often pushed to the margins... I have not been afraid to play characters who are judged and who are misunderstood and who have not been granted full rights of citizenship as human beings. But, here's the great irony: I don't decided to play the characters I play as a political choice. Yet, the characters I play often do become political statements. Because, having your story told as a woman, as a person of color, as a lesbian, as a trans person or as any member of any disenfranchised community is sadly often a radical idea. There is so much power in storytelling and there is enormous power in inclusive storytelling."

–Kerry Washington, accepting the Vanguard Award at the 2015 GLAAD Awards¹

¹ Kerry Washington, "Kerry Washington Accepts the Vanguard Award at the #glaadawards," YouTube Video, posted by "GLAAD," 0:40, March 21, 2015 accessed March 21, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ruv8As-_CMg

Introduction

In 2012 teen country star-turned pop icon, Taylor Swift, publicly declared that she did not believe in feminism in an interview with *The Daily Beast*. The seven-time Grammy winner explained, “I don’t really think about things as guys versus girls. I never have. I was raised by parents who brought me up to think if you work as hard as guys, you can go far in life.”² Just over a year later she retracted her statement about feminism, claiming a feminist identity in an interview in *The Guardian*: “As a teenager, I didn’t understand that saying you’re a feminist is just saying that you hope women and men will have equal rights and equal opportunities... I’ve been taking a feminist stance without actually saying so.”³ After her initial comments rejecting feminism, Twitter users quickly pointed out what Swift did not yet understand—she was, in fact, a feminist. The Twitter account inspired by Swift’s comments in *The Daily Beast*, @FeministTaylorSwift (created and run by Brown University student, Clara Beyer), has 101,000 followers to-date.⁴ For the account, Beyer satirically reworks Swift’s popular lyrics to make them about gender equality. The huge popularity of a fan account that has no direct association to Swift herself shows the pervasiveness of celebrity culture in online

² Emily Thomas, “Taylor Swift Reveals She Has Been A Feminist All Along,” *The Huffington Post*, August 24, 2014, accessed March 31, 2015, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/24/taylor-swift-feminist-n 5704691.html>

³ Emily Thomas, “Taylor Swift Reveals She Has Been A Feminist All Along.”

⁴ Clara Beyer, “@FeministTaylorSwift,” Twitter Account, accessed March 15, 2015, <https://twitter.com/feministtswift>

settings and the ability for individuals to use and to appropriate celebrity brands for individuals to build a platform. Following Swift's self-declaration in *The Guardian*, many of her fans and journalists embraced her new identity. *Identities.Mic* even published an article titled "9 Times Taylor Swift Was Right About Feminism in 2014." The article highlights the many ways she uses her platform as a way to present a cultural critique to the public through a gender studies lens: she used interviews to discuss the ways women are treated differently from men in the music industry, she used her art to create a music video that is a feminist critique of the media's representation of women and she publicly shared how and why she came to identify as feminist.⁵ Taylor Swift—and her entire celebrity platform in mass media and online—brought a definition of feminism to a very large body of fans who might not have otherwise encountered a working definition of the movement in their daily lives.

Taylor Swift, as one of the most popular celebrities of the moment, has the profound ability to reach a wide audience. Swift unites people across backgrounds and locations all come in contact with her music and media content, whether or not they like her as an artist and agree with her politics. This unifying force of her content is what media scholar Michael Warner describes as a *public*. Drawing from sociologist Jürgen Habermas' understanding of "the public sphere" Warner defines a public as a self-organized relation among strangers who are united by reflexive

⁵ Elizabeth Plank, "9 Times Taylor Swift Was Right About Feminism in 2014," *Mic*, December 5, 2014, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://mic.com/articles/104616/9-times-taylor-swift-got-feminism-just-right-in-2014>

discourse on a particular platform or around a particular body of content.⁶ Warner explains, “A public might be real and efficacious, but its reality lies in just this reflexivity by which an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence.”⁷ Rather, publics are organized around content and around platforms. Publics require an object (be it content or a platform) for people to gather around and interact with. By this definition, Swift is the center of a public. She creates content people come in contact with, address, critique and share. The discourse surrounding her actions, her statements and her content serve to engage a larger public of people who have a wide variety of thoughts and critiques about Swift and her work yet are united by the mutual engagement with her content.

Taylor Swift may unite a public in a shared experience and knowledge of her content, yet every individual who interacts with her content may not necessarily agree with the values she promotes or with the content she creates. Warner explains the groups that organize with a political agenda around a specific platform as counterpublics. According to Warner,

Some publics are defined by their tension with a larger public... Discussion within such a public is understood to contravene the rules obtaining to the world at large, being structured by alternative dispositions of protocols, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying. This kind of public is, in effect, a counterpublic: it maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status.⁸

⁶ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, (New York, Zone Books) 2002, 67-124.

⁷ Ibid., 67.

⁸ Ibid., 56.

By this definition, the Twitter account @FeministTaylorSwift is a counterpublic. It operates within the public of Taylor Swift's identity, yet the account features targeted content aimed specifically at challenging Swift's image. @FeministTaylorSwift consciously opposes Swift's own denouncement of feminism. Therefore, the Twitter account gathered people who were already part of a public united by Swift's work in conscious opposition of to Swift's identity. Participation and interaction with @FeministTaylorSwift required acknowledgment of its subordinate status within the context of the public Swift facilitates.

Many publics gather around mass media content—movies, books and magazines. However, mass media culture expects consumers to internalize content as opposed to critically engage with it. This kind of consumption presents challenges for social critique because it relies on content as a finished product, rather than as simply a starting point for a larger conversation. Cultural theorist James Bau Graves challenges a mass media creator/consumer relationship within the context of cultural performance: "The practice of cultural democracy requires mechanisms for opening the public cultural process. We need participation from the participators, not simply on the receiving end of programs but throughout the chain of development."⁹ Thus, rather than a media system that relies solely on a creator/consumer relationship that does not intersect, Bau Graves advocates for a media structure that allows consumers to actively create and comment on content as well. Particularly, online platforms provide the tools for individuals to interact with, enhance and change mass media content. New media (online spaces and multi-

⁹ James Bau Graves, *Cultural Democracy*, (Champaign: University of Illinois, 2005), 77.

way communication) creates opportunities for individuals to create their own cultural power within the mediasphere and allows for greater participation among the public. Mass media content becomes simply a starting point of content that grows and develops into something else when put into a new media context. Media educator and journalist Antonio Lopez equates new media to cultural commons in his book, *The Media Ecosystem: What Ecology can Teach Us About Responsible Media Practice*. Lopez explains, “Characteristics of the cultural commons include reciprocity, mutual support, participation, intergenerational dialogue, self-sufficiency and receptiveness... The *mediasphere* is an all-encompassing media ecosystem that mixes various concepts: mediated cultural commons facilitates planetary communications.”¹⁰ By this definition, the public can use platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, YouTube and Tumblr to uphold democracy in media spaces. According to Lopez, new media has the ability to put creative power in the hands of consumers as Bau Graves advocates for in performance. Increasing interactivity throughout the creation process, allows for a more democratic media space.

Drawing on Lopez’s understanding of new media as a social justice tool, this thesis evaluates how new media (two way media communication in which individuals can comment on, share and critique mass media content) and celebrity culture intersect in the feminist movement, organizing as counterpublics online in conscious opposition to a mass public. The first chapter evaluates the ways in which large companies employ the rhetoric of gender equality in online spaces to use

¹⁰ Antonio López, *The Media Ecosystem: What Ecology Can Teach Us About Responsible Media Practice*, (Berkeley: Evolver Editions, 2012) ix.

women as a commodity for a profit. Chapter two explores how celebrities and their fans negotiate with the limitations of mass, mainstream media by placing their image and their content in online, interactive settings. Finally, chapter three analyzes how people organize in the feminist movement around content intended for online spaces, looking specifically at the hashtag #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen. In these three contexts, new media serves as a tool for social organizers to create more inclusive social justice frameworks and navigate the limiting nature of mass, one-way, communication. This interaction between mass media and online platforms allows individuals to highlight and critique one of the long-standing questions of the feminist movement, addressing what kind of women the feminist movement has historically served and how to make it a movement more accessible and valuable for a wide variety of women with different experiences.

In the fight for equality, many feminists have organized publicly, however this recent slew of celebrities are coming out as feminist during a particular moment of social organizing that uses the interactivity between mass media (one-way communication) and new media (two or multi-way communication) to generate political organization and cultural critique. Historically, media and pop culture have been rooted in mass communication and on a performer/audience relationship that hinges on the audience purely as spectators. Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky explain in their essay, "A Propaganda Model:" "It [the mass media] is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the

larger society.”¹¹ By this definition, mass media promotes conformity—it is to be subjected *to*, not interacted *with*. The lack of interactivity within mass media presents challenges for individual consumers to engage with the content. And, as Chomsky and Herman explain, as a tool for social activism it often reinforces social norms and conformity as opposed to critically challenging systems of oppression.

While mass media presents challenges for critique and conversation, new media opens up opportunities for interactivity for many media consumers. Whereas someone like Taylor Swift would have simply been a social icon people read about in magazines and newspapers in the 1960s, she—and many other public figures—is now readily accessible to the public to communicate *with*. This change in communication means that her brand and her actions represent her identity as a feminist on every platform she participates in—music (on the radio, on television and online), in magazines, in social media and in public interviews. This pervasiveness of media content also means that Swift is more readily accessible to critics who can critique her representation of feminism in the attempt to improve it or direct her followers to more robust definitions of the term and of the movement. Swift embodies the way social movements organize in new media today with single individuals having access to resources to share their thoughts and ideas at their fingertips and with large corporations simultaneously colonizing the new media space that at first glance seems entirely democratic.

¹¹ Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, “A Propaganda Model,” in *Media and Cultural Studies KeyWorks* ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham et al. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 257.

Taylor Swift is not the only celebrity to speak out about her feminist identity. Recently, Lena Dunham, Emma Stone, Beyoncé and Emma Watson, have all joined the ranks of publicly feminist celebrities. While feminism is having a moment in the sun with many pop culture icons publicly embracing a feminist identity, feminists have a long history of politically organizing. Feminist scholar bell hooks defines the feminist movement as when “groups of people come together with an organized strategy to take action and eliminate the patriarchy.” In this sense, feminist organizing is a counterpublic united in subordination from the patriarchy. This kind of organizing around gender equality has happened for centuries in America, all the way from women politically organizing for suffrage to the women’s liberation movement that named sexism within middle class households. And, while organizing in the name of gender equality has taken many forms (public protests, legal reform and Consciousness Raising group) today people come together in organized strategy to take action and eliminate the patriarchy by organizing around media content. So, while these celebrities may simply be people who create public artistic work, they also facilitate a platform for strategic organization that is accessible to a mass audience of people.

While people have organized around gender equality for centuries, the kinds of reforms feminists historically advocated for certainly had their limitations. “Organized strategy” within the context of the feminist movement historically situated gender as the primary cause of inequality for women, without addressing the multiplicity of ways many women experience marginalization. The women’s liberation movement, for example, strategically organized to “liberate” a specific

group of privileged women. As hooks explains, “The women’s liberation movement has not only been structured on a narrow platform, it primarily called attention to issues primarily relevant to women (mostly white) with class privilege.”¹² This attention only to issues of equality for women who have race and class privilege serves to elevate those who have privilege while continuing to marginalize women who are disenfranchised in other ways; it fails to take into account that *women* are also women of color, women with disabilities, low income women, queer women etcetera. Thus, many contemporary feminist theorists and organizers root their work in bringing the experiences of women who experience marginalization in a variety of ways to the center of the feminist movement. hooks advocates for an understanding of feminism rooted in and understanding of intersectionality of marginalization:

Every woman can stand in political opposition to sexist, racist, heterosexist, and classist oppression... Women must learn to accept responsibility for fighting oppressions that may not directly affect us as individuals. Feminist movement, like other radical movements in our society, suffers when individual concerns and priorities are the only reasons for participation. When we show our concern for the collective, we strengthen our solidarity.¹³

This version of feminism hooks describes serves as the guiding framework for a third wave definition of feminism which requires participants to evaluate their own positionality and actively acknowledge the ways women who have a multiplicity of backgrounds may experience marginalization in different ways. hook’s understanding of feminism, a radical movement rooted in women fighting oppressions that may not directly affect them as individuals, expands the limited

¹² bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000) xii.

¹³ hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 64.

framework of the women's liberation movement that operated primarily by and for women with race and class privileged women. Rather than limit political activism for one's own access to socio-political equality, hooks articulates an understanding of feminism that requires organizing around the convergence of multiple marginalizations.

Mass media's representation of feminism has certainly contributed to a narrow definition of feminism because it leaves little to no room for critique and interaction. When viewed solely as representation of mass media, the content Taylor Swift produces contradicts her public feminist identity. While many people praised Swift for her public embrace of feminism, many third wave feminist leaders also voiced concern that Swift did not fully understand a working definition of the third wave feminist movement that seeks to bring intersecting marginalizations to the forefront of the political movement. Most recently, critics voiced concerns about her music video, "Shake It Off." The video, meant to be about "shaking off" negativity and insecurity, featured Swift attempting (and failing) to dance gracefully. And, while at first the video could seem light-hearted, feminists voiced serious concerns about how Swift used certain styles of dance that have roots in specific cultural traditions to poke fun at herself. As Professor of Women's, Gender and Sexuality studies at the University at Albany, Janell Hobson explains in a blog post for *Ms. Magazine*,

When Taylor Swift deliberately positions her awkwardly dancing body in 'Shake It Off' as a way to defend her innocence against the constant slut-shaming she has experienced, she reifies her whiteness, her purity. ... There is also a racialized lens that is applied to this awkwardness, which

connotes sexual innocence that protects the pop star from the charges of sexual excess to which she has been subjected.¹⁴

When Swift places herself literally between the legs of women of color who are hypersexualized against Swift's "purity", Swift fetishizes her their bodies for her own personal gain (Figure 0.1). This image Swift constructed in the video contradicts



Figure 0.1: Taylor Swift, "Shake It Off" (please see appendix for citations of images)

statements she has made publicly about the representation of women in media. On a French-Canadian talk show, *Tout Le Monde En Parle*, she explained: "One thing I do believe as a feminist is that we have to stop making it a girl fight. We have to stop being so interested in seeing girls tear each other down. It has to be more about cheering each other on."¹⁵ The statement contradicts her behavior in the video where she literally gawks at other women's bodies. While she may not be actively fighting with other women, her body language shows that she sees them as other and as something unlike herself.

Many critics have expressed that this public display of racism and use of white privilege for self-promotion underlines that Swift is not a third-wave feminist.

¹⁴ Janell Hobson, "Bodies On the Line: The Streets Vs. Pop-Culture," *Ms. Magazine Blog*, August 20, 2014, accessed March 25, 2015, http://msmagazine.com/blog/2014/08/20/bodies-on-the-line-the-streets-vs-pop-culture-2/?utm_content=buffera5d39&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer

¹⁵ Taylor Swift, "Taylor Swift on Feminism," Youtube video, 0:10, posted by "Alejandra Rodriguez," September 30, 2014, accessed March 30, 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iW3kZFFZ6mU>

Dr. Zuleyka Zevallos explains on her blog, *The Other Sociologist*, “Taylor Swift has positioned herself publicly as a feminist, though her enactment of these ideals was already not without problems. This video shows she has little understanding of the history of feminism and the cultural struggles faced by women of color.”¹⁶ Based on Hobson and Zevallos’ criticisms, while Swift may try to promote gender equality in the public eye, because her work is so intertwined with her identity everything she makes public must follow the guiding principles of feminism that mean one must constantly and actively work towards equality to claim a feminist identity. As third-wave feminist scholar Rebecca Walker explains, “To be a feminist is to integrate an ideology of equality and female empowerment into the very fiber of my life.”¹⁷ In other words, Taylor Swift cannot be a feminist *sometimes* and still be a feminist. In a mass media setting (when only shown on TV without interaction in online spaces), Taylor Swift’s “Shake It Off” video is purely to be seen and internalized. When only seen in mass media, the audience watches the performer with the expectation of conformity. Within this context, the video further reinforces the sexualization of African American women in American culture without any question or contradiction. As Herman and Chomsky continue, “media serve the ends of a dominant elite.”¹⁸ In the case Taylor Swift’s video, it serves the ends of preserving

¹⁶ Zuleyka Zevallos, “Taylor Swift Having Fun With White Privilege: Racism and Sexism in Pop Culture,” *The Other Sociologist*, August 22, 2014, accessed March 25, 2015 <http://othersociologist.com/2014/08/22/taylor-swift-white-privilege-racism/>

¹⁷ Rebecca Walker, “Becoming the Third Wave,” *Ms. Magazine*, Spring 2002, Accessed April 18, 2015 <http://www.msmagazine.com/spring2002/BecomingThirdWaveRebeccaWalker.pdf>

¹⁸ Herman et al., “A Propaganda Model,” 257.

her power as a white woman at the expense of women of color. Thus, content reinforces dominant power structures that privilege some identities within this system of mass media that relies solely on output of information without interactivity between creators and consumers.

The online attention and criticism surrounding Swift's video is one example of new media advancing democracy because users are able to add to and comment on the content Swift produced. For example, Hobson, can go online to blog for *Ms. Magazine* where she can comment on popular culture while also interacting with more media users who comment on her own writing. The large number of responses to Hobson's article demonstrates what a democratic new media space could look like. One commenter, "Ben", critiqued Hobson's article saying, "Yes I agree that's [sic] it's [sic] degrading to women, but don't drag Racism into a problem just because there [sic] was a black woman [sic] twerking in a Taylor Swift video."¹⁹ In this comment, Ben engaged with both Hobson and Swift, creating a dialogue about the content Swift produced. But, interacting in online spaces is not just about interacting with the initial person who created the content—in this case Swift or Hobson. Instead, new media provides a space for users to interact with each other. Hobson responded directly to Ben's comment saying, "Ben... Taylor Swift became racially problematic once she incorporated black female twerking bodies into her narrative... Don't for a minute think these pop-culture narratives are divorced from

¹⁹ Ben, August 22, 2014 (4:14 pm), comment on Janell Hobson, "Bodies on the Line: The Streets vs. Pop Culture," The Ms. Magazine Blog, accessed March 30, 2015 http://msmagazine.com/blog/2014/08/20/bodies-on-the-line-the-streets-vs-pop-culture-2/?utm_content=buffera5d39&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer

the larger racial politics of this country.”²⁰ This interaction demonstrates a media space Lopez advocates for in which users participate in and hold each other accountable for the content they create. Instead of letting Ben’s comments sit as an open critique without any follow up or interaction, Hobson pushed the conversation forward and engaged with the commenter in a dialogue. Rather than a product of mass (one-way) media, new media allows media users to place Swift’s content within a democratic space for consumers to praise, critique and engage with both the material and each other on an interactive level toward creating media that is more inclusive and democratic.

While timely and relevant to current events, evaluating popular culture in a new media setting presented a number of challenges as a researcher. The primary challenge in evaluating the present moment is a reflection of popular culture itself where primary sources constantly shift and change with a celebrity making a public speech or a new trending hashtag. Thus, this thesis only evaluates content created before April of 2015. Additionally, because of the contemporary nature of this thesis, finding content specifically addressing the material I sought to evaluate presented a challenge. Therefore, I used feminist scholarship relating to other forms of media (e.g. books and movies) and placed them within the framework and theory of new media. Finally, due to the constantly changing nature of new media, it became

²⁰ Janell Hobson, August 23, 2014 (4:53 am), comment on Janell Hobson, “Bodies on the Line: The Streets vs. Pop Culture,” The Ms. Magazine Blog, accessed March 30, 2015
http://msmagazine.com/blog/2014/08/20/bodies-on-the-line-the-streets-vs-pop-culture-2/?utm_content=buffera5d39&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer

imperative to keep a catalogue of primary sources to ensure that they were still accessible even if the creator eventually took them down or deleted them (as often happens in online spaces). Taking screenshots of tweets, blogs and images helped ensure accessibility to primary sources throughout the duration of the project. While difficult to keep up with the growing number and shifting nature of primary sources related to celebrity culture, new media and the feminist movement, ultimately, evaluating content located in contemporary culture speaks to the relevance of the topic and asserts its significance within a larger historical context.

Despite its challenges, the importance of studying media as a tool for cultural creation and social critique rests in the power it has to enter everyday life. As Media Studies professor Susan J. Douglas explains, “If enough people think studying media is a waste of time, then the media themselves can seem less influential than they really are. They get off the hook for doing what they do best: promoting a white, upper-middle-class, male view of the world.”²¹ Media is everywhere and it is a uniting part of people’s lives. Media—content, celebrities and platforms serve to unite a public. It is in those public spaces where counterpublics can grow, critique and expand mass media and people engage in a true cultural criticism in a constructive way. Swift may be a pop star, tweets may be 140 characters and corporations may simply making more money, but they are making statements about gender equality and they are making them in a very public way. Their statements may be flawed and imperfect, but new media allows for greater access

²¹ Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Times Books, 1985) 10.

for individuals to critique and perfect what they consume. And, most importantly, it makes room for the voices that have often been erased.

Chapter I

Princesses For Sale!

Exploitation of Women in Advertising in New Media

“We all grow up in a culture where women’s bodies are constantly turned into things.”
 – Jean Killbourne, Director and Producer of *Killing Us Softly*

On June 26th, 2014, *Always* (the *Proctor & Gamble* feminine hygiene products brand), released their latest ad campaign. The campaign, titled *#LikeAGirl* seeks to “re-write the rules” about what it means to be a girl all the while selling pads and tampons. Advertising agency, Leo Burnett crafted a mini-documentary for *Always* specifically for a new media setting rather than a 30 second ad for people watching primetime television. The video focuses on girls’ self-esteem and deconstructs the micro-aggression “like a girl.” Over the course of three minutes participants play charades in response to the director’s prompt to “run like a girl.” The viewer watches over and over again as people respond to the prompt with weak, ditzy, bubbly versions of running. Then, the director prompts young girls (10 years old and younger) to do the same: “Let me see you run like a girl.”²² Their response is different. They run. The point is clear: “running like a girl” should mean just that—running like a girl (fast, strong and hard). The campaign encourages social media users to use the hashtag *#LikeAGirl* online to shift the connotation of the statement from an insult to a compliment. Yet, while the video makes a strong socio-political point—one that encourages reflection about the role of girls and women in society—it falls in line with a history of advertisers using women as tools to sell

²² “Always *#LikeAGirl*,” YouTube Video, 1:25, posted by “Always,” published June 26, 2014, accessed November 1, 2014.

products. However, instead of presenting women as the always happy, carefree, conventionally beautiful women advertisers usually depict in tampon commercials, in this advertisement *Always* addresses the self esteem issues that the long history of objectification of women in advertising created. The video is powerful. It makes a very narrow and specific point about language and it encourages practical social engagement by promoting the hashtag.

Always is not the only company shifting their advertising strategy to both take advantage of new media and address gender equality. Many other companies like *Chevy*, *Dove* and *Lego* have recently released content that celebrates girls and women as empowered individuals. Most recently, in October, 2014, for-profit t-shirt company, *FCK H8*, released their newest campaign, “F-Bombs for Feminism: Potty Mouthed Princesses Use Bad Word For Good Cause,” in which they dressed girls up as princesses and had them repeatedly use the word “fuck” while reciting statistics about gender inequality in America, followed by the a plug for viewers to buy t-shirts. They explain that \$5 from every \$15 t-shirt goes to charities fighting sexism.²³ The company, which describes itself as a “T-shirt company with an activist heart and a passion for social change,” creates inflammatory videos that address social justice issues of racism, sexism and homophobia in an exploitive and insensitive way.²⁴ Under the guise of social change and feminism, “F-Bombs for Feminism” uses girls as something for consumers to so the company to can make a profit.

²³ “F-Bombs For Feminism: Potty-Mouthed Princesses Use Bad Word For Good Cause,” YouTube video, published by “FCKH8,” published October 21, 2014.

²⁴ “About Us,” FCK H8.com, accessed November 20, 2014.

New media creates new opportunities for small production companies to distribute their content online for a minimal cost. Large corporations and for-profit companies are also finding new opportunities to reach a buying audience through new media. Media and Economic theorist Dallas W. Smythe explains that the principal product of the commercial mass media is “audience power.”²⁵ Thus, commercial mass media provides advertisers with an audience of consumers. Mass media has economically perpetuated the capitalist system that leads advertisers to consumers. With more people consuming content in online spaces rather than in television programming, advertisers had to look for a new venue to reach a buying audience. Where new media has often been a space for average people without a big budget but with a voice to share their ideas, it has also become a place proliferated by advertisers coming up with clever ways to reach consumers. Theoretically, the content advertisers create for new media would differ from the content advertisers make for mass media. To some extent it does—it is often longer and fosters some expectation of community engagement. However, quite often the content they create falls in line with a history of exploiting women for profit. Corporations capitalize off of women in old media; they turn women into a product, privileging white women as a standard of beauty and glorifying sexual assault. Similarly, *Always* and *FCK H8* use women in new media to sell their product, yet they do so in a new media setting. *Always*, while still using women to sell a product, represents the possibilities in new media for companies to create content by tackling issues of

²⁵ Dallas W. Smythe, “On the Audience Commodity and its Work,” in *Media and Cultural Studies KeyWorks*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham et al. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd 2006), 233.

sexism in an effective way that takes on a clear, single issue while still supporting a for-profit company with the primary goal of selling a product. *FCK H8*, on the other hand, creates content for new media that objectifies girls while glorifying feminism and thus must confront critics about its content because of its online presence.

In mass media, advertisers use objectifying stereotypes of women to sell products. As documentarian Jean Kilbourne explains, “We all grow up in a culture where women’s bodies are constantly turned into things—into objects... And, this is everywhere, in all kinds of advertising.”²⁶ For example, a *Nutrigrain* cereal bar advertisement turns a woman’s bottom into two cinnamon rolls (figure 1.1), a *Popchip* ad turns a woman’s breasts into potato chips (figure 1.2), and a *Tom Ford* ad turns a woman’s vagina into a bottle of perfume (figure 1.3). Constantly, advertisements turn women into things that can be bought and sold with money. This representation means that women are not just seen as consumers, they are also a product.



Figure 1.1 *Nutrigrain* ad

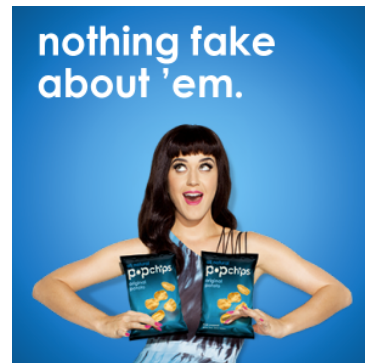


Figure 1.2 *Popchip* ad

Advertisements depict women in a way that they (as people) can be bought and sold and used at companies’ disposal to make a profit.

²⁶ Jean Kilbourne, “Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising’s Image of Women [Trailer] – Available on DVD, “ YouTube Video, 01:54, posted by ChallengingMedia, March 12, 2010.

The objectification in advertising and creation of social problems stemming from content has created the space for advertisers to make what this thesis calls “girl power advertising.” The self-esteem issues created by



Figure 1.3 Tom Ford ad

advertising led advertisers to create a new genre of content geared specifically at addressing women’s self confidence and body positivity. *Always* uses this phenomenon of girl power advertising in their *#LikeAGirl* campaign. However, while the content is different (instead of presenting content that degrades women, the campaign displays an important message of pride in being a girl), the campaign still uses females to sell a product in a way that is in line with the historical use of women in advertising. A small sound bite in the *Always* ad questions, “so, when they’re in that vulnerable time between 10 and 12 how do you think it affects them when someone uses ‘like a girl’ as an insult?”²⁷ The director accompanies this question with intertitles that read, “A girl’s confidence plummets during puberty. *Always* wants to change that.”²⁸ Here, *Always* argues that buying their products could change girls’ self esteem. The products they sell are the same. There is no reason to think the products purchased from this advertisement will change girls’ self-esteem any more or less than the products sold from the ad that features a girl playing limbo on the beach in a white bikini (figure 1.4). Again, girls—and all they

²⁷ “Always “#LikeAGirl,” YouTube Video, 1:25, posted by “Always,” published June 26, 2014, accessed November 1, 2014.

²⁸ Always, “#LikeAGirl,” 1:25.

encompass—are “things” to buy. The people the advertisement features are just the short change to the audience buying the product.

Where *Always* uses girls’ self-esteem to convince consumers to buy a product, *FCK H8* uses princess culture to associate girls with something to buy. *FCK H8* uses princess culture in their video as a rhetorical motive by dressing the girls in tacky, sparkly, princess

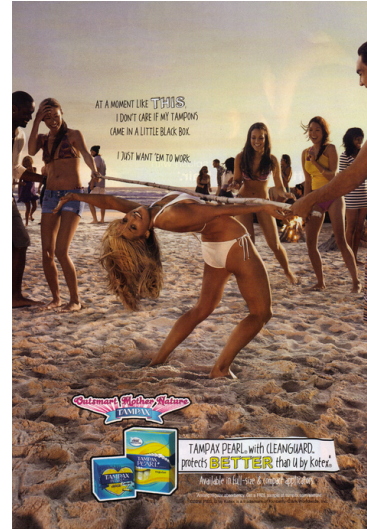


Figure 1.4 Tampax ad

dresses and caking their faces with makeup. Princess culture has created a global multi-billion dollar industry. Princess films are not just about telling a good story. Instead, they are about creating an industry where companies can sell everything from dolls, clothing and school supplies with girls’ favorite princess on them to tickets to amusement parks where young kids can interact with their favorite characters. In this way, princess content is directly linked to purchasing a product.

Journalist, Peggy Orienstien explains this shift in the early 2000s:

“For the first time, he [the new Disney Chairman of Consumer Products, Andy Mooney] decides they are going to market them [Disney Princesses] separate from the film’s release and they are going to call them Disney Princesses and it’s just going to be about the merchandise... The first year they were a \$300 million a year business. And, in nine years—so by 2009—they were a \$4 billion a year business with 26,000 Disney Princess products.”²⁹

Under this model, fictional characters become things to buy and by association girls who dress up as princesses in this advertisement become the same. Using the 2013 animated Disney hit, *Frozen*, as an example, the film is now the largest Disney

²⁹ “Interview With Peggy Orenstein,” YouTube video, posted by KQED, February 16th, 2011, 01:15

franchise ever. As economic reporter, Leon Lazaroff explains: “*Frozen* is no longer a movie, it’s a global brand, a larger than life franchise built around products, theme parks and sequels that could last into the next century. Disney gave a modern generation of young girls... a film they could embrace, and a lot of theme park rides and merchandise they could buy.”³⁰ While box office revenue brought in \$1.27 million, the merchandise associated with the product sold just as well, with Disney selling 3 million *Frozen* costumes within a year of the film’s release.³¹ The sales success clearly demonstrates that “princess movies” are about far more than their story; they are about consumers buying products to profit the *Disney* corporation and its investors. This association with purchasing goods is clear in *FCK H8*’s video. Just as *Disney* tries to sell *Frozen* costumes, the campaign—which literally features girls dressed as princesses—tries to sell the viewer a t-shirt. Both *Disney* and *FCK H8* use the idea of princesses (and girls, for that matter) to sell a product.

Similar to how celebrities have been used to attract attention to a cause, *FCK H8* uses the idea of princesses to market feminism to viewers. Author of *Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches From The Front Lines of New Girlie-Girl Culture*, Peggy Orenstein, equates princess to celebrities: “By the time girls are five, after all, the human Disney Princess du jour is meant to supplant the animated ones in their hearts. Miley [Cyrus]. Lindsay [Lohan]. Hilary [Duff]. Even, once upon a time, Britney

³⁰ Leon Lazeroff, “Disney’s ‘Frozen’ Will Become The Biggest Franchise Ever,” *The Street*, accessed November 18, 2014, <http://www.thestreet.com/story/12943710/1/disneys-frozen-will-become-the-biggest-franchise-ever.html>

³¹ Brooks Barns, “3 Million ‘Frozen’ Princess Dresses Sold, Disney Says,” *The New York Times*, Accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/05/business/media/frozen-princess-dresses-are-hot-sellers-disney-says.html?_r=0

[Spears].”³² The role of princesses in the *FCK H8* video echoes the role of celebrities in many other social justice campaigns. After Hurricane Katrina, Brad Pitt founded the “Make It Right” campaign in which Pitt combined “star power and celebrity advocacy to attract media attention and investment to help rebuild the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood in New Orleans.”³³ In theory, the use of celebrities like Harry Connick Jr., Scarlett Johanson and Brad Pitt in the “Make It Right” campaign would bring media attention to the devastation in the Lower Ninth Ward in the hopes of attracting economic donors. However, the use of celebrities in this context oversimplifies, glorifies and commodifies the economic, social and political situation in the Lower Ninth Ward and presents celebrities as authoritative voices on the issue. The “Make It Right” website touts Pitt as an expert on the devastation of the Ninth Ward. The tab of the website labeled “about” frames the mission of the organization within a narrative that highlights the actor. The website touts: “When Brad Pitt visited New Orleans’ Lower 9th Ward two years after Hurricane Katrina, he was shocked by the lack of rebuilding progress in this historic, working class community... Pitt believed that if we could build safe, sustainable homes in the most devastated part of New Orleans, we would prove that high-quality, green housing could be built affordably everywhere.”³⁴ This narrative situates Pitt not just as someone trying to raise awareness about an important social justice issue, but also

³² Peggy Oreinstein, *Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches From the Frontlines of the New Girlie-Girl Culture*, (New York, HarperCollins), 2011, 115.

³³ Kevin Fox Gotham, “Make It Right? Brad Pitt, Post-Katrina Rebuilding and the Spectacularization of Disaster,” in *Commodity Activism*, ed. Sarah Banet-Wiser and Roopali Mukherjee, (New York: New York University Press) 2012, 99.

³⁴ Make It Right, “History,” Accessed November 28, 2014, <http://makeitright.org/about/history/>

as someone who offers a solution to the problem—a role usually reserved for experts. In using Pitt in the narrative of the organization, “Make It Right” becomes focused on the actor’s efforts rather than on the real social problems and the people they are trying to help. And, rather than frame the narrative from the perspective of the people most affected by the hurricane, “Make It Right” turns social justice into a celebrity spectacle.

While advertisers often represent women in a way that displays them as a product for consumers to buy, the racial representation of who can be bought or sold in this system privileges white women and erases racial minorities. As Cameron Russell explains in her Ted Talk, “Looks Aren’t Everything. Believe Me, I’m a Model:”

For the past few centuries, we have defined beauty not just as health and youth and symmetry that we’re biologically programmed to admire, but also as tall, slender figures and femininity and white skin... In 2007 a very inspired NYU PhD student counted all the models on the runway, every single one of them that was hired and of the 677 models that were hired only 27, or less than 4% were non-white.³⁵

The failure to hire models of a variety of races reinforces a definition of beauty in the advertising industry (and in American society as a whole) that privileges white skin. The use of predominantly fair skinned models also places economic value on whiteness. Two media scholars, Cynthia M. Frisby and Erika Engstrom, support Russell’s conclusion in a study they conducted looking at the prevalence of Women of Color in bridal magazines. They found that in the over 6,000 ads they studied,

³⁵ Cameron Russell, “Looks Aren’t Everything. Believe Me, I’m a Model,” YouTube Video, 02:55, posted by “TED,” January 16, 2013.

only 2% featured an African American woman as a bride.³⁶ In a society that values conventional women as wives, this eliminates Women of Color from seeming conventionally valuable to society. Additionally, the failure to include African American women in these advertisements ignores their buying power. While the models who are featured in advertisements are predominantly white and are represented as commodities, they are at least deemed culturally agentic enough to sell a product.

Where advertising has historically left out people of color the *FCK H8* video also privileges whiteness. The rhetorical motive the director uses in the video hinges on young girls saying the word “fuck” in order to draw attention to sexism. The opening dialogue of the video is as follows: “I’m not some pretty fucking helpless princess in distress. I’m pretty fucking powerful and ready for success. So, what is more offensive? A little girl saying ‘fuck?’ Or the fucking unequal and sexist way society treats girls and women?”³⁷ Essentially, the video uses the shock appeal of young girls swearing to address sexism. However, just as advertisers have left women of color out of mass advertising, the producers of the *FCK H8* video ad left girls of color out of the video. The directors casted this video to appear as though the cast is racially diverse. However, on closer examination, primarily girls who appear to be white swear in the video. To be exact, the girls who look white say the word “fuck” twelve times in the three-minute ad, however the girls who appear to

³⁶ Cynthia M. Frisby and Erika Engstrom, “Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride: Portrayal of Woman of Color in Bridal Magazines,” *Media Report to Women*, 34 (2006), 10-14, accessed November 28, 2014.

³⁷ FCKH8, “F-Bombs For Feminism: Potty-Mouthed Princesses Use Bad Word For Good Cause,” 00:05

be of color only say the word “fuck” twice. This use of language creates a guise that the video takes into account the experience of sexism of people of many different marginalized groups while silencing them in the process. If people of color are left out of the rhetorical motive of the video, they are left out of making the point about sexism the video tries to make. Like celebrity involvement in post-Katrina relief, this use of language allows the narrative of sexism to rest only in the hands of the privileged group (in this case white girls) rather than fully exploring the issue at hand.

Because the *FCK H8* video focuses on girls using swear words to discuss sexism, those who do not swear cannot discuss their experiences with sexism in this video. This silencing of voices falls in line with the historical exclusion of women of color both in media and in the feminist movement. The exclusion of women of color began as early as the fight for suffrage in the late 19th Century when some suffragists clearly articulated that black women were not wanted or needed in the fight for the vote. As Regina Bernard explains in her book, *Black and Brown Waves: The Cultural Politics of Young Women of Color Feminism* (2009), “The first wave [of feminism] quite simply dealt with white women from the United States and the United Kingdom noting their struggle as women’s suffrage. Their fight was in the name of equality among white women who wanted the right to vote.”³⁸ In 1898, President of the National Association of Colored Women, Mary Church Terrell, responded to this limited view of the movement: “The colored American believes in equal justice to all, regardless of race, color, creed or sex and longs for the day when the United States,

³⁸ Regina Andrea Bernard, *Black and Brown Waves: The Cultural Politics of Young Women of Color Feminism*, (Boston: Sense Publishers, 2009) 1.

shall indeed have a government of the people, for the people and by the people—even including colored people.”³⁹ Women of Color were effectively left out of the suffragist movement just as Girls of Color were left out of the *FCK H8* video. Feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins comments on the importance of the inclusion of women of color in feminist organizing: “Black women’s exclusion from positions of power within mainstream institutions has led to the elevation of elite white male ideas and interests in traditional scholarship.”⁴⁰ *FCK H8*’s use of primarily white girls to make a point about gender equality serves to elevate girls who appear to be white while continuing to marginalize girls of color. *FCK H8*’s casting and directorial choices reinforce a version of feminism that situates white women at the center of the feminist movement.

The *FCK H8* video assumes that statistics hold for all women, regardless of their race or class. The girls in the video spit out statistics like: “Women are paid 23% less than men for the exact same fucking work.” While this may be an effective and dramatic way to spark viewer interests as it is a very clear statistic that shows exactly how sexism affects the entire society, it also assumes white privilege. Looking at statistics about the wage gap specifically for minorities, African American women make only 64 cents and Hispanic women make only 54 cents to the dollar every white, non-Hispanic man makes.⁴¹ By failing to include these numbers, the organization ignores the systematic problems in society that create marginalization.

³⁹ Mary Church Terrell, “The Progress of Colored Women” (Washington: Smith Brothers, 1898). Library of Congress, Daniel A. P. Murray Pamphlet Collection.

⁴⁰ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, (New York, Routledge Classics, 2009), 7.

⁴¹ National Women’s Law Center, “Equal Pay and the Wage Gap,” accessed November 22, 2014.

While trying to create a campaign that addresses the problematic nature of sexism in society, they ignore the societal structure of racism that contributes to many women's marginalization. Much like the suffragists who were afraid that the inclusion of African Americans in their cause would distract from their end goals, the over-simplistic nature of this video that does not account for a multiplicity of experiences as a woman conveys that the marginalizations many women of color face are not a priority for FCK H8's version of feminism.

Always goes to greater lengths to account for intersectionality in their ad, yet the video still marginalizes people of color. Like the *FCK H8* ad, *Always* presents girls who appear to be of a variety of different races. However, when looking specifically at who has the most airtime, no African American young girls speak and only one African American woman speaks (very briefly) in comparison to three women who appear to be white who provide commentary on the microaggression. Certainly, this representation is problematic because it silences the experiences of African American women with the microaggression "like a girl." However, because *Always* does not present statistics in the same way the *FCK H8* does, the message is slightly different. Because they do not present hard statistics, they do not assume that the experience and numbers are the same for all girls. It would be different, however, if they presented general statistics about the number of girls who play sports because it would not account for the wide variety of factors that make extracurricular activities more or less accessible to girls. Additionally, *Always* takes advantage of the possibilities of new media by creating a wide variety of content. In addition to the initial #LikeAGirl ad, they released a series in which they talked to individual young

vulnerable. The 1960's advertisement for the menswear company, *Broomsticks* depicts a group of men surrounding a woman wearing lingerie accompanied with the text, "Ring around Rosie. Or Carol. Or Eleanor etc. Fun. But you can only play if you wear Broomsticks slacks."⁴⁴ This ad essentially validates sexual assault for *Broomsticks* slacks wearers (figure 1.5). It says, "If you buy these pants, it is okay to gang rape women." This ad falls in line with the sentiment in the 1960s that women were supposed to be at the service of men both at work and in the home. The jobs available to women in the 1960s were largely focused in serving men. Junior Writer at ad agency J. Walter Thompson, Anne Wallach, explains, "The minute you stopped being a secretary and became a junior writer, you put a hat on. I wore glasses and had trouble juggling the hat and the glasses, but I never would have taken the hat off. Even in the bathroom."⁴⁵ This example demonstrates that women filling a role outside of service to men were so unexpected that they needed a physical indicator to signal to other people in the office that they were anything but a secretary. Additionally, many women who worked in the 1960s did so out of necessity, often meaning they had to take care of men at work and their children and husbands at home. Gail Collins recounts: "Most women [worked] because their families needed the money, and very few made enough to hire people to help with child care and cooking... but rich or poor they, they had the shared sense that all domestic

⁴⁴ Dominic Green "15 Ads That Glorify Sexual Assault Against Women," *Business Insider*, May 18, 2013, accessed November 20, 2014, <http://www.businessinsider.com/sex-violence-against-women-ads-2013-5>

⁴⁵ Gail Collins, *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 2010), 28.

responsibilities were on their shoulders.”⁴⁶ Within this historical context, the *Broomsticks* ad asserts that women should be at the service of men sexually, too. The *Broomsticks* ad bears striking resemblance to a string of modern *Calvin Klein* and *Dolce & Gabbana* ads that graphically depict a gang rape (figure 1.6).⁴⁷ These representations mean that advertisers are not only capitalizing off of sexism, but also that they are commodifying sexual assault and trivializing the portrayal of sexual assault survivors.

The *FCK H8* video also glorifies sexual assault. Much like *Dolce & Gabbana* and *Calvin Klein* use the image of sexual assault to buy their products, the *FCK H8* video uses sexual assault to convince viewers to buy a shirt. About halfway through the video, directly following a



Figure 1.6 *Dolce & Gabbana* ad

line in which one little girl states, “I shouldn’t need a penis to get paid,” the girls enter into a section of the video called, “Rape and Violence: Fucked Up Facts.”⁴⁸ The girls explain, “One out of every five women will be sexually assaulted or raped by a man.” They then proceed to count off: “One, two, three, four, five. Which one of us will it be?” This moment of the video is eerily slow and low-energy compared to the rest. In many ways it seems out of place from the hyper energetic vibe of the rest of

⁴⁶ Collins, *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present*, 27.

⁴⁷ Green, “15 Ads That Glorify Sexual Assault Against Women.”

⁴⁸ “F-Bombs For Feminism: Potty-Mouthed Princesses Use Bad Word For Good Cause,” 00:50.

the ad. The moment calls attention to the very serious nature of sexual assault, however, it does so in a way that trivializes the issue. The girls are still dressed up in cheap princess costumes, their faces are still caked with make-up and the bottom line is that they are there to sell a t-shirt. All of this is as if to say “buy a shirt and girls won’t get sexually assaulted.” This depiction of sexual assault relates back to the *Dolce & Gabana* and *Calvin Klein* ads that used sexual assault to sell a product. The messages are exactly the opposite, but the exploitive nature of addressing sexual assault as a means to make a profit continues the legacy in advertising of trivializing and exploiting women’s experience with sexual assault and violence.

The glorification of feminism displayed in *FCK H8*’s video speaks to the problematic nature of both using celebrity (or in this case princess) culture and consolidating a topic with such complexities into a 3-minute viral video. Returning to Gotham’s critique of Brad Pitt’s “Make It Right Campaign,” Gotham argued that, “One major limitation of using spectacles to dramatize and convey New Orleans’s plight (as well as other social problems and political issues) is that by their nature, spectacles are focused around consumption and entertainment, not politics and broad societal transformation.”⁴⁹ Gotham’s analysis is essentially what is at play in the *FCK H8* video. The use of princesses as stand-ins for celebrities dramatizes the subject matter and the focus on a consumer product viewers can buy emphasizes the capitalistic nature of the video. In order to make a profit, the video adheres to the economically successful but exploitive history of advertising under the guise of social change. Therefore, *FCK H8* uses feminism, and girls for that matter, to make a

⁴⁹ Gotham, “Make It Right? Brad Pitt, Post-Katrina Rebuilding and the Spectacularization of Disaster,” 104.

profit. Additionally, the “F-Bombs For Feminism” campaign rests on its ability to convince the viewer that buying a product will somehow change sexism in America. In the context of “Make It Right,” Gotham explains, “Disaster-as-spectacle constitutes people as consumers and uses advertising and marketing to exploit consumer desires to rebuild the Lower Ninth Ward for profit and economic gain.”⁵⁰ Similarly, the *FCK H8* campaign hinges on viewers as consumers rather than addressing the real issues at hand. It creates a spectacle out of feminism in the hopes that people will buy a product. Additionally, assuming that purchasing their shirts *would* actually change sexism, this business model limits who they think has the ability to participate in the feminist movement because it relies on a certain amount of class privilege to participate in the way the video encourages.

Recognizing *FCK H8*'s video's original intended audience was in online spaces (like the *Always* ad), the video was available for a wide audience of potential consumers, but was also vulnerable to direct critique that engaged with the video itself. Returning to Warner's theory of publics, he defines publics as a consuming audience: “In each case, the public, as a people, is thought to include everyone within the field in question... A public can also be a second thing: a concrete audience, a crowd witnessing itself in visible space, as with a theatrical public. Such a public also has a totality, bounded by the event of by the shared physical space.”⁵¹ With this understanding, the *FCK H8* video clearly created a public of consumers. By publishing the video online and in a shareable way, they created a

⁵⁰ Gotham, “Make It Right? Brad Pitt, Post-Katrina Rebuilding and the Spectacularization of Disaster,” 104.

⁵¹ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, (New York, Zone Books) 2002, 65-66.

large viewing public that grew as the video took to social media. What this public shares is the commonality of having all seen the video. The wide distribution of the video online allowed for a large public of viewers to grow.

While a large number of people shared and viewed the video, the public did not always receive its message or its strategy positively. As *Ms. Magazine* blogger, Anne Thériault, explains,

[The video] has been shared hundreds of thousands of times on Facebook alone. This isn't surprising—it's a video designed to hit that marketing sweet spot where people are equal parts outraged, deluged and just plain not sure what to think. I'd be willing to bet that this video has had nearly as many hate-shares and 'is this offensive?' shares as it has people positing it because they think it's great.⁵²

Following the release of the video, bloggers and social media users began both embracing the video and offering a harsh critique. Just a few days after *FCK H8* shared "F-Bombs for Feminism," *Ms. Magazine* published a scathing review accusing the company of "exploiting little girls to sell t-shirts."⁵³ Thériault explained, "what I see is a video that relies on the shock value of girls in princess costumes cussing and talking about rape in order to increase its shareability... There's nothing feminist about using little girls as props in order to sell t-shirts—in fact, I would argue that this is the opposite of feminism."⁵⁴ Thériault was not alone in her critique. Her post alone received 34 comments within just about a week. One commenter even stated, "Thank you for this article. I am one who shared the video because I liked it. I had no

⁵² Anne Thériault, "FCKH8 Exploits Little Girls to Sell T-Shirts," *Ms. Magazine*, accessed November 2, 2014.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

idea it was a for-profit company and that this is essentially a t-shirt ad.”⁵⁵ The response to this video is equally, if not more important than the distribution of the video itself. The overwhelming response to the video shows that the video was successful in reaching a wide viewing audience. However, it also shows that the public has the ability to visibly critique content especially in an online setting. Where *Always* took advantage of new media by using it to provide depth to the topic they were addressing, *FCK H8* faced criticism within new media for their video’s over-simplistic nature.

Bloggers’ critiques responded to the ways *FCK H8*’s video falls in line with the way women are used in old media. Perhaps the most overwhelming critique responds to the use of girls to make a profit. Caitlin Dewey writes for *The Washington Post*: “What they’re actually asking, of course, is this: What’s more offensive: the way society treats women, or a little girl dropping f-bombs according to a script, written by adults, to sell T-shirts?”⁵⁶ By acknowledging how they are using girls, she responds to the problematic nature of old media advertisements using women to sell a product. Other critics responded to the *FCK H8*’s use of statistics. One student blogger, Emily Holdruen, explains: “This video is made for mainstream media’s usual safe depiction of feminism—general, source-less

⁵⁵ Steve, October 24, 2014 (12:26 p.m.), comment on Anne Thériault, “FCKH8 Exploits Little Girls to Sell T-Shirts,” *Ms. Magazine*, accessed November 2, 2014.

⁵⁶ Caitlin Dewey, “The many, many problems with FCK H8’s ‘potty-mouthed princesses’ video,” *The Washington Post*, October 23, 2014, accessed November 2, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/10/23/the-many-many-problems-with-fckh8s-potty-mouthed-princess-video/>

statistics with a quirky twist.”⁵⁷ This responds to the over-simplistic use of statistics in relationship to how they apply to women of different races. Some bloggers also comment on the problematic nature of using sexual assault to sell a product, especially when children are the primary focus of the video. A post on the blog, *The Belle Jar*, explains, “There is for *sure* nothing feminist about having girls as young as six years old discussing rape and sexual assault... Forcing a child to ask an audience of adults if she’ll someday become a rape statistic so that your company can line its pockets with cash is definitely not the way to practice social justice.”⁵⁸ This response critiques the use of sexual assault to sell a product, especially one under the guise of social justice. All of these critiques respond directly to the exploitive nature of the *FCK H8* video and old media advertising’s use of women.

What came out of the critique of the video was not just chatter. Rather the critiques created a new public of consumers. Returning to Warner’s definition of counterpublics, Warner expands on Nancy Fraser’s definition of counterpublics which are as Fraser explains, “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs.”⁵⁹ Warner elaborates, “A counterpublic maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status.” Thus, counterpublics are groups that gather in

⁵⁷ Emily Holdgruen, “Do your research before you FCKH8: Profitable feminism an abomination to progress,” *The Lamron*, October 30, 2014, accessed November 2, 2014, <http://thelamron.com/2014/10/30/research-fckh8/>

⁵⁸ “FCK H8 Exploits Little Girls In Order to Sell T-Shirts,” *The Belle Jar*, October 22, 2014, accessed December 10, 2014, <http://bellejar.ca/2014/10/22/fckh8-exploits-little-girls-in-order-to-sell-t-shirts/>

⁵⁹ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 118.

opposition to a public. Their commonality, or uniting feature, is their conscious opposition. Regarding the *FCK H8* video as a public, the critics gathered potential consumers in opposition to the video. Just as the video created a viewing public, blog posts in opposition to the video created another reading public.

While a counterpublic generates opposition to a public, it ultimately strategically shifts the prevailing ideology of the public. As Warner explains, “Friction against the dominant public forces the poetic-expressive character of counterpublic discourse to become salient to consciousness.”⁶⁰ This shift means that the counterpublic somehow alters dominant ideologies or at least brings counterarguments into the dominant conversation. In the case of the response to the *FCK H8* video, critics created a successful counterpublic as they critiqued mainstream conversations that then became a mainstream newsworthy topic, catching the attention of *Time*, *The Washington Post* and even *Entertainment Tonight*. The criticism of the video on these mainstream websites means that the counterpublic that started on small blogs like *RebeccaHains.com* succeeded in significantly influencing the public. While the criticism of the video on mainstream media is notable, the response it garnered from YouTube itself is extremely important. Following the criticism of the *FCK H8* video, after it had gained over 100,000 views, YouTube removed the video from their website because of language. This responds to critics’ concerns that the language used by young girls in the video glorifies the issue of sexism. While a spokesperson of the T-shirt company argued that it was censorship, the removal of the video from YouTube, represents a shift in

⁶⁰ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 120.

the availability of the content because of counterpublic criticism. Though critiques of the video entering the mainstream is certainly a step in altering the mainstream as a whole, the second *FCK H8* video, “Potty-Mouth Princesses Part 2: Girls F-Bomb Domestic Violence by FCKH8.com,” demonstrates an even greater shift. The video opens with a young boy pretending to be drunk and delivering the dialogue, “What do you tell a woman with two black eyes? Nothing! You already told her twice.”⁶¹ Then, the video transitions to little girls still dressed as princesses and swearing (this time they have the shocking addition of fake bruises and cuts on their faces) in the name of ending domestic violence. The content of this video is as problematic as the initial video in that it still uses girls as a commodity and exploits assault. However, the overarching goal of the video has change. Like the first video, adults take over at the end to encourage people to buy a t-shirt. But, this time they explicitly state that 100% of the proceeds (as opposed to \$5) are going to non-profits working to combat domestic violence.⁶² This change responds to many bloggers’ concerns about the for-profit nature of the company. This change, if anything, shows a shift even if there are still aspects of the video that are incredibly problematic.

Where *FCK H8* altered their content based on new media response, *Always* used new media to create new content. When they published their first #LikeAGirl ad they encouraged their viewers to interact online using the hashtag to show the company everything they do “like a girl.” Months later, they published a follow up

⁶¹ “Potty-Mouth Princesses Part 2: Girls F-Bomb Domestic Violence by FCKH8.com,” 00:01, YouTube video, published by “FCKH8,” published November 24, 2014.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 01:52.

90-second commercial—this time the company made it almost entirely out of viewer submissions and home videos of girls doing everything from math and chemistry to hockey and gymnastics “like a girl.” Rather than altering their content in response to online criticism as FCK H8 did, they strategically planned the new media release of their initial add as content that required interaction. While still put out by a large corporation with the goal of making a profit, the content this time represents the experiences of their viewing audience. New media effectively placed creative participatory power in the hands of the consumers.

FCK H8's new ad campaign falls in line with a history of women in advertising. It exploits young girls and turns them into a product to buy in order to make a profit. It uses sexual assault as an advertising ploy and reinforces a beauty ideal that privileges white women. The *Always* ad, also created for new media, shows some possibilities for how advertisers can create healthier content for women in an online setting. It tackles a very specific issue and uses the breadth of content creation ability new media affords to look at the issue with complexity. But, there are two key traits that are very different about this ad in comparison to other for-profit ads. First, the ad was made in the name of social justice—exploiting feminism (and by association women) for profit. Second, *Always* made the ad specifically for new media—media that relies on viewer engagement and distribution. Rather than an ad that companies distribute on primetime television or in magazines and reaches a captive audience, *FCK H8* expects to generate an audience through the “shareability” of the video. Thus, viewers were able to influence the success of the video. While some people touted the ad as new, edgy

and important, many others criticized *FCK H8* for exploiting little girls and undermining the goals of feminism. Through audience engagement that was meant to generate support for the campaign, *FCK H8* actually developed a core group of bloggers, critics and social media users who generated a critique of the campaign. But instead of staying on blogs and social media, the criticism was able to reach mainstream platforms, changing the conversation about how women are represented in media overall. The incredible response to this video demonstrates how viewers can use new media to critique and expand mainstream content to influence what mainstream companies are creating and sharing with the public.

Chapter II

Decolonizing The Twittiverse: Pop Culture Icons Bring Feminism into the Public Eye

"It's one of those things where I'm sort of like here I am, if I am embracing a patriarchal gaze with this presentation [blonde wigs and high-heeled shoes]... And I think the really honest answer is that I have sort of constructed myself in a way so that I don't want to disappear. I think so often there is erasure... There's an erasure of certain bodies and certain identities. I have not ever been interested in being invisible and being erased. A lot of how I am negotiating these systems of oppression—in trying not to be erased—is perhaps buying into and playing into the patriarchal gaze." – Laverne Cox (Actress on "Orange Is The New Black" and Trans Activist) in a public conversation with bell hooks at The New School*

Thirty-six million and six hundred thousand people tuned in to the Oscars in February 2015 to see Patricia Arquette accept the award for "Best Supporting Actress" and deliver a passion-filled speech to rousing applause.⁶³ Arquette closed her 60-second acceptance speech with a tribute to women: "To every woman who gave birth to every taxpayer and citizen of this nation—we have fought for everybody else's equal rights. It's our time to have wage equality once and for all and equal rights for women in the United States of America."⁶⁴ Almost immediately, the speech went viral, with people taking to social media to share quotes, GIFs and screen shots of the moment. However, not everyone expressed support for Arquette's appeal in the aftermath of the event. Some conservatives pointed out that

⁶³ Tim Surette, "How Many People Watched the Oscars? Not As Many As ABC Would Have Liked," TV Line, February 23, 2015, accessed March 10, 2015, <http://www.tvguide.com/news/academy-awards-ratings-2015/>

⁶⁴ Patricia Arquette, "2015 Oscars Acceptance Speech," YouTube video, posted by "Oscar Live," February 23, 2015, accessed March 10, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jTNQojp7-t8>

the Equal Pay Act has been in place for over 50 years.⁶⁵ And, the online Feminist community also voiced critiques and concerns following the event. Arquette followed up her speech with an interview back stage in which she elaborated on her initial remarks: "It's time for all the women in America and all the men that love women, and all the gay people, and all the people of color that we've all fought for to fight for us now."⁶⁶ Arquette is right to appeal to different identities. As bell hooks explains, "Feminist consciousness-raising for males is essential to revolutionary movement as female groups."⁶⁷ However, the way Arquette appeals to other marginalized groups pidgeonholes each group against one another, rather than looking at the groups as a people working towards a similar goal of equality. Rather than appealing to people working towards equality as a collective public in search of a similar goal, she locates each group as a counterpublic that circulates within and appeals only to itself.

Most of the criticism of Arquette's speech after the event surrounded Arquette's failure to account for and acknowledge her own privilege in a system of oppression where a multiplicity of factors (including but not limited to gender) lead to wage inequality. As blogger Trip E. explains in their criticism of Arquette's speech on *F-bomb.com*,

⁶⁵ Matthew Jelalian, "Patricia Arquette's Speech Draws Criticism from Both Sides of the Aisle," *Deseret News National*, February 24, 2015, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://national.deseretnews.com/article/3630/patricia-arquettes-equal-pay-speech-draws-criticism-from-both-sides-of-the-aisle.html>

⁶⁶ Itay Hod, "Patricia Arquette on Oscar Speech Fumble: 'I Should Have Chosen My Words A Little More Carefully,'" *The Wrap*, March 3, 2015, accessed March 15, 2015, <http://www.thewrap.com/patricia-arquette-on-oscar-speech-fumble-i-would-have-chosen-my-words-a-little-more-carefully/>

⁶⁷ bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), 12.

Does no one else find it a little uncomfortable that Arquette, a straight white woman with a net worth of \$24 million was the one speaking about the wage gap when, as of 2014, the women most affected by the gender wage gap were women of color? This doesn't even take into account the wage gaps between straight men and gay men or how trans women find their incomes dropping by nearly ONE THIRD after they transition.⁶⁸

Trip E. was not alone in their criticism. So many people turned to social media to critique the speech that Arquette herself was compelled to respond to her critics through a series of tweets: "The working poor women of this country have been asking for help for decades. If I have 'privilege' or a voice I will shine a light on them."⁶⁹ Arquette acknowledges her power in pop culture to bring attention to causes she is passionate about simply because the public knows her name and she often appears in media. Yet, in her appeal she fails to acknowledge that many people do not necessarily share her experience. And, in appealing to her audience in such a limited way, she presents a limited understanding of social justice, gender equality and the wage gap for her viewers.

Beyoncé is yet another celebrity vocally taking a feminist stance in the media, using her platform to educate her fan-base about gender equality. Where Patricia Arquette uses new media primarily to follow up statements she makes in mass media, Beyoncé infuses new media into all content she creates from the start, fostering a platform and a public dedicated to interactivity and critique in all aspects

⁶⁸ Trip E., "The Major Problem With Patricia Arquette's 'Feminist' Oscar Speech," *F-Bomb*, February 24, 2015, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://thebomb.org/2015/02/the-major-problem-with-patricia-arquettes-feminist-oscar-speech/>

⁶⁹ "Patricia Arquette Tweets in Defense of her #EqualPay Comments, 'Don't Talk To Me About Privilege,'" *Inquisitr Celebrity News*, February 24, 2015, accessed March 25, 2015, <http://www.inquisitr.com/1871332/patricia-arquette-tweets-frantic-defense-of-equalpay-comments/>

of content creation. Beyoncé's use of new media serves as a way to navigate and deconstruct expectations in a mass media setting. Deniz Kandiyoti outlines a concept she call "bargaining with the patriarchy," "women strategize within a set of concrete constraints that prevail and define the blueprint of what I will term the *patriarchal bargain*... they influence both the potential for and specific forms of women's active or passive resistance."⁷⁰ As demonstrated in chapter one, the mass media often objectifies and commodifies women, serving as a constraint for how women can organize within media. Patricia Arquette and Beyoncé's use of new media serves as a form of bargain with the limitations of mass media, as it allows them to create and distribute content that deconstructs their image in mass media.

While Arquette and Beyoncé certainly generated a lot of buzz, they are by no means the first celebrity to use their platform to make a statement about gender equality. Emma Watson, Lena Dunham and Sarah Silverman have also recently used their cultural capital to make provocative statements about gender equality. However, these celebrities operate and gain power in a system that has often degraded them. As Professor of Communications Studies Susan J. Douglas explains: "Mass media, predicated on the notion of national, unified market, and their reason d'être was to reach as many people as possible... TV and advertisers offered homogenized, romanticized images of America, which... eschewed controversy and reinforced middle-class, white-bread norms and values."⁷¹ In order to gain power within this system, one must look and act a very specific way—a way that reflects

⁷⁰ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining With Patriarchy," in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, ed. Carole R. McCann et al., (New York: Routledge, 2013), 98.

⁷¹ Susan J. Douglas, *Where The Girls Are: Growing Up Female in the Mass Media*, (New York, Times Books, 1995), 15.

the center, not the margins. As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels explain in their essay, “The Ruling Class and the Ruling Ideas:” “The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it.”⁷² In a mass media setting, advancing within the system requires already having privileged access to it. Thus, people of power in the media represent a specific demographic of people who often have identity privileges of gender, race and class. Therefore, even when celebrities speak out about social justice issues, they often do so from the privileged perspective on which they built their power. In a media age that relies on sound bites and sensational virality and condenses complex ideas to 140 characters or a 60 second acceptance speech, their platforms serve to simply start a conversation within the context of their privileged positionality. Celebrities themselves cannot serve as a public because they are just a single representation. To incorporate a multiplicity of ideas and identities, social critics must place celebrities in the context of new media, evaluating them on online platforms where everyone can create and critique content in a more democratic way.

Patricia Arquette presented a limited definition of feminism in the mass media, yet when placed in the context of new media many critics expanded on her definition. In addition to criticism about Arquette’s appeal for wage equality from a privileged position that failed to account for other experiences, many more people

⁷² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The Ruling Class and The Ruling Ideas,” in *Media and Cultural Studies Key Works*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Druham et al. (Malden, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2011), 11.

voiced concern about her limited definition of feminism that essentially argued that other disenfranchised groups (people of color and gay people) should now help women fight for equality. This assertion ignores the fact that many women are also people of color and/or gay and that marginalization often intersects. Feminist scholar bell hooks has laid the groundwork for an understanding of feminism that brings disenfranchised groups into convergence. Returning to hook's foundational book, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, hooks recounts her experience growing up as a woman of color: "We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin... This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center. Our survival depended on an ongoing private acknowledgement that we were a necessary, vital part of the whole."⁷³ Her call for a social movement that requires brining those at the margins into the center of the movement conflicts with Arquette's comments that assert social movements for marginalized groups are separate for each identity. hooks argues that each person has a multiplicity of marginalizations and that feminism should bring intersecting identities into the mission of the movement. Arquette's speech and the subsequent online interaction demonstrate how celebrities, only when placed in an online setting that involves multiple perspectives and access, can expand and democratize the narrow definitions of feminism presented in mass media. While they may bring attention to a topic in mass media, constructive conversation happens when they are placed in online settings rather than seen as a totality.

⁷³ hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin To Center*, xvii.

Where Patricia Arquette's speech may have been limited in scope, some celebrities have used their platform to support hook's theory. In her acceptance speech for the GLAAD 2015 Vanguard Award Scandal actress Kerry Washington spoke about the importance of intersecting marginalized identities:

I may be preaching to the choir, but I am going to say it anyway... because I know on Monday people are going to click on a link to find out what the lady from Scandal said... Women, poor people, people of color, people with disabilities, immigrants, gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, trans people, intersex people—we have been pitted against each other and made to feel like there are limited seats at the table for those of us who fall into the category of “other” ...⁷⁴

This speech demonstrates that Kerry Washington has an understanding of both her own cultural capital and intersectional social movements. Washington reiterates hook's understanding of social movements that brings many identities into convergence, encouraging marginalized groups to collaborate rather than isolate themselves from each other. Washington recognizes the power in her name and her stage, acknowledging that many people will watch her speech simply because she gave it. Yet, she also acknowledges the limitations in her immediate viewing audience. Given that GLAAD is an organization dedicated to advancing queer rights, she acknowledges that her direct audience at the event may already be informed in intersectional cultural criticism. She also makes note that just because she gives this talk to a particular audience does not mean that it will ultimately stay within that audience: “people are going to click on a link to see what that lady from Scandal said.”⁷⁵ Here, she effectively acknowledges the power of counterpublics in a new

⁷⁴ Washington, “Kerry Washington accepts the Vanguard at the #glaadawards,” 0:41.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 0:50.

media setting. In the context of queer counterpublics Warner explains, “It [content directed at a specific counterpublic] might therefore circulate in special protected venues, in limited publications... The expansive nature of public address will seek to keep moving that frontier for a queer public, to seek more and more places to circulate where people will recognize themselves in its address.”⁷⁶ For Washington, new media serves as the space to ensure that her talk does not circulate solely within a specific counterpublic. By acknowledging that people will “click a link” she recognizes the Internet as the tool for sharing her talk with a larger public.

Just as Kerry Washington acknowledges the power of her name, Arquette’s name holds similar cultural power. Arquette’s speech was certainly flawed in the sense that it dismissed the multiplicity of identities many women. However, it created a platform for a conversation about pro-intersectional feminism. The aftermath of her speech was just as much applause as it was criticism with *Slate* even publishing an article titled, “Patricia Arquette’s Feminism: Only For White Women.”⁷⁷ Many other people took to Twitter responding to her speech and started a dialogue with Arquette herself. Twitter user @HegartyKatie tweeted, “Women’s rights are huge. Hell, I work at a feminist org. But don’t imply other rights are taken care of. #Oscars2015.”⁷⁸ Another user @Webspinner77 echoed her sentiments,

⁷⁶ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 120.

⁷⁷ Amanda Marcotte, “Patricia Arquette’s Feminism: Only For White Women,” *Slate*, February 23, 2015, accessed April 6, 2015, http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2015/02/23/patricia_arquette_on_pay_equality_insulting_to_feminism.html

⁷⁸ Lindsey Kupfer, “Patricia Arquette Defends Feminist Oscars Comments,” *Page Six*, February 23, 2015, Accessed March 25, 2015, <http://pagesix.com/2015/02/23/patricia-arquette-defends-feminist-oscar-night-comments/>.

“Patricia Arquette sure ruined her nice moment. Fighting against one injustice does not excuse blindness to others.”⁷⁹ Their comments garnered attention and Arquette responded: “Guess which women are the most negatively effected in wage inequality? Women of color. #Equalpay for ALL women. Women stand together in this.”⁸⁰ In many ways, the interactivity involved in new media discourse allows for experiences that are often rendered to the margins to situate themselves in the center. Individual users interacting with Patricia Arquette’s speech uses the cultural power in the celebrities name to make a new, critical point and bring their ideas into the mainstream pop culture. As media theorist Alison Trope explains in the context of Angelina Jolie’s MTV documentary set in Africa, “Jolie’s participation no doubt played a pivotal role in MTV’s decision to produce and air this video... Jolie has cachet with MTV’s audience and therefore can harness the network as a site to disseminate information and instigate action.” Just as Angelina Jolie’s name had weight for the MTV producers and viewing audience, Patricia Arquette’s name has the ability to attract large audience. However, when others critique Arquette’s work and use her content to make points that dialogue with what she initially said that dialogue and critique removes celebrities from the position of totality they occupy in mass media that allows for only one-way communication. Rather than addressing *the* public as a totality, when placed in social media, they create *a* public of engaged individuals. This conversation about the varying experiences of women that included a diverse group of Twitter users and Oscars viewers was possible because

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

of the accessibility of new media and gained attention in part because of Arquette's cultural capital.

Modern day celebrities are not the first people to recognize the power in pop culture to attract a large audience. In the 1970s feminist icon Gloria Steinem became a household name by writing an undercover exposé about Playboy Bunnies, "A Bunny's Tale." In the piece, Steinem outlined the days she spent as a Playboy Bunny, detailing rules she had to follow and conversations she had with other Bunnies in an attempt to expose sexism in the industry. On her first day undercover, Steinem recounts, "One of the girls got up and crossed to the desk, her high heeled plastic sandals slapping smartly against her heels. 'Look,' she said, 'you want these measurements with or without a bra?' 'With,' said Miss Shay. 'But I'm bigger without,' said the girl. 'All right,' said Miss Shay wearily, 'without.'"⁸¹ Simply a recounting of events, the piece offered little analysis from Steinem herself, but it brought Steinem into the media spotlight and kick started her career in feminist journalism—one that would lead her to be most well-known for creating the iconic *Ms. Magazine*. Steinem has publicly shared that she regrets going under cover in such a capacity. However, her ability to insert herself within the pop culture phenomenon of Playboy Bunny Clubs allowed her to offer a public critique that, in turn, created change for many women in the clubs. As Steinem explained in a conversation with *CBS's* Rebecca Jarvis, "The waitresses had to have internal exams and Wassermann tests for venereal disease, and they were told it was a requirement

⁸¹ Gloria Steinem, "A Bunny's Tale: Show's First Exposé for Intelligent People," *Show*, May 1963, Undercover Reporting, Deception For Journalism's Sake: A Database: 99, accessed March 10, 2015, <http://dlib.nyu.edu/undercover/i-bunnys-tale-gloria-steinem-show-magazine>

of the state—hello—it wasn't at all. That changed, some things changed, and exposed it as tacky, which it really was.”⁸² In many ways, she brought her then radical understanding of gender roles from the margins of pop culture to the center of the public's understanding of Playboy. By becoming a part of pop culture, she was able to work within the system to critique and change it. As Warner established counterpublics rooted in singular identities can alter the public only when they participate in the public itself. Steinem, as a representative of a counterpublic rooted in a gender equality shifted and altered the public by actively becoming a part of it.

While Steinem entered Playboy culture and offered a critique, her ability access the system relied on her own white privilege. According to Steinem, Playboy Bunny culture was incredibly racist, “Black women (or, “Negro Girls” as I believe they were still saying) were called chocolate bunnies. All the Puerto Rican guys were bussing the tables. It was pretty bad.”⁸³ Her whiteness allowed her to have enough cultural capital to become part of mainstream pop culture. Steinem's remarks articulate her understanding that her race granted her access to this power structure. While Arquette denies her racial privilege, her whiteness still also granted her access to a stage and a public platform often reserved for people who appear white. While the Oscars bring in large viewership, the people who receive awards at the event make up a very specific demographic of mostly white, upper class,

⁸² Gloria Steinem and Rebecca Jarvis, “Steinem Sets the Record Straight In New Doc,” YouTube video, 5:20, posted by “CBS News,” August 11, 2011, accessed March 20, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocKvq31385U>

⁸³ Gloria Steinem, “Gloria Steinem on Being a Playboy Bunny,” YouTube video, 1:58, posted by “hudsonunionsociety,” February 18, 2009, accessed March 20, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRC7x6qRpks>

cisnormative people; all of the acting nominees were white in the 2015 Oscars.⁸⁴ This representation at the Oscars reflects a media industry that centers primarily on white, straight men and leaves people with other identity experiences at the margins. According to the Hollywood Diversity Report conducted at UCLA, in 2013 minorities made up just 16% of lead characters while representing just over 37% of the population.⁸⁵ Thus, while mainstream pop culture may be a space for celebrities to make important political statements, the hegemonic nature of the media limits who has access to the platform and to the audience to make political statements. Therefore, the conversation surrounding feminism and gender equality in the mass media often only reflects the experience of gender marginalization for a very particular, race and class privileged, group of women. This limited access means that the people speaking on behalf of women on this platform largely represent racially privileged women.

Beyoncé represents an identity that has gained cultural agency within a system that privileges white skin. However, in order to gain access to that power she also had to submit to it. Arquette is not the only woman using her platform and the public eye to make a statement about gender equality in modern media. Musician and pop-culture icon, Beyoncé, recently used her stage and her art to address gender inequality. While she had been producing a number of girl-power anthems

⁸⁴ Tatiana Siegel, "Oscars: All Acting Nominees Are White," *The Hollywood Reporter*, January 15, 2015, accessed March 15, 2015, http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

⁸⁵ "2015 Hollywood Diversity Report: Flipping the Script," Ralph J Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.bunchecenter.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/2015-Hollywood-Diversity-Report-2-25-15.pdf>

for several years, Beyoncé finally came out publicly as a feminist during her performance at the 2014 MTV Video Music Awards (VMAs). During the performance, she sang a portion of her song “**FLAWLESS” while silhouetted against a screen that read “feminist” (figure 2.1). This public declaration provided the language for the political stance she made in the song. The song, Beyoncé’s own public declaration of self-love and pride, includes a sampling of novelist Chimamanda Adichie’s Ted Talk, “Why We Should All Be Feminists.” In the song Adichie explains,

We teach girls to shrink themselves—to make themselves smaller. We say to girls, ‘You can have ambition, but not too much. You should aim to be successful, but not too successful. Otherwise you will threaten the man...’ But why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage and we don’t teach boys the same? We teach girls to see each other as competitors, not for jobs or accomplishments which I think can be a good thing, but for the attention of men. We teach girls that they cannot be sexual beings in the way that boys are. Feminist: a person who believes in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes.⁸⁶

This compilation of Adichie’s words works in conjunction with Beyoncé’s lyrics, which over and over again state: “I woke up like this. We flawless. Ladies, tell ‘em,” define feminism for Beyoncé and her fans.⁸⁷ In many ways, Beyoncé is saying



Figure 2.1 – Beyoncé at the MTV Video Music Awards

⁸⁶ Beyoncé Knowles, “Beyoncé-**Flawless ft. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie” YouTube video, 1:27, posted by “beyonceVEVO,” November 24, 2014, accessed March 6, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IyuUWOnS9BY>

⁸⁷ Ibid., 2:30.

that society has taught her gender inequality as Adichie outlines it. Her public declaration, her success and her sexuality all respond to Adichie's comments. For Beyoncé, the very act of having self-pride in a patriarchal system of gender oppression is a feminist act. By highlighting Adichie's work, Beyoncé brings the political opinion of a woman of color (an identity that is often marginalized in pop culture) to one of the biggest public stages in music.

While new media is a space for critics to deconstruct celebrities, it is also a place for celebrities to deconstruct themselves. What separates Beyoncé's public declaration of feminism from Arquette's is her use of other sources to make a political point—she started a conversation that already included multiple voices from different positionalities. Rather than quoting an expert or citing facts and numbers, Arquette made a broad point about gender equality with nothing other than her own credibility to back it up. Certainly Arquette was constrained by time, but because she relied solely on making her point from her own frame of reference, she was unable to address large systems of oppression. Beyoncé, on the other hand, drew upon Adichie to provide the theoretical framework for the political point she made. She used Adichie to explain the system of gender inequality and then used her own personal experience as a commentary to show how she fits into the theoretical framework. Beyoncé comments on her choice of using Adichie: "Everything she said is exactly how I feel."⁸⁸ Beyoncé creates content based primarily on communication, collaboration and critique from the start. Adichie defined an understanding of

⁸⁸ Beyoncé Knowles, "'Self-Titled': Part 2. Imperfection," YouTube video, 1:58, posted by "Beyoncé," December 17, 2013, accessed March 6, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cIv1z6n3Xxo>

gender marginalization that resonated with Beyoncé. Beyoncé, because of her platform, was then able to share Adichie's scholarship with millions more people.

While no woman in the public eye can avoid comments about her appearance or presentation, many critics have become hyper-aware of Beyoncé's own self-representation, especially in terms of her adherence to white beauty standards. In a panel discussion about body politics at The New School hooks questions the political implications of Beyoncé's appearance: "Is the whole hair thing [long blonde hair]... and to what extent does that deep affirmation of a white racist aesthetic then mediate the sexual? Can we imagine Beyoncé with her dread locks moving the hearts and soul of all the white people who claim to be so moved?"⁸⁹ In essence, hooks argues that Beyoncé's self-presentation is not for herself—it is for the people who are watching her. Media scholar Maura Mulvey defines the male gaze explaining, "In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*."⁹⁰ With this definition and hooks' analysis of Beyoncé's appearance, Beyoncé presents herself "to be looked at." Additionally, Beyoncé, rather than bring black beauty to the center of pop culture, pushes it farther to the margins by altering her appearance to appeal to white beauty standards. This representation perpetuates the single identity within mass media as oppose to a mass media space that includes a variety of identities.

⁸⁹ "Transgression: Who's Booty Is This?", YouTube video, 39:54, posted by "The New School," October 10, 2014. Accessed March 15, 2015.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJZ4x04CI8c>

⁹⁰ Lara Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Media and Cultural Studies Key Works*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Druham et al. (Malden, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2011), 346.

While Beyoncé's subjection to the white patriarchal gaze may have helped her grow a fan base and get attention in a media culture that centers on white, cisnormative beauty for the attention of men her own construction of her image is intentional, putting herself in control of how the public sees her. In an online video series she released in conjunction with her self-titled visual album, she explains: "I had this image of these trophies and accepting these awards and kind of training myself to be this champion... You get this trophy and you're like 'I basically starved... I conformed to what everybody else thinks I should be. And I have this trophy...' The trophy represents all of the sacrifices I made as a kid... And, I just want to blow that shit up."⁹¹ Here, she acknowledges that her conformity to a certain ideal of beauty and conventional art got her recognition and built her platform. She also acknowledges that her conformity to these ideals was conscious—she knew what she had to do and how she had to alter her body in order to build her personal brand in the music industry. As Kandiyoti explain in relationship to patriarchal bargain, "Their passive resistance takes the form of claiming their half if this particular patriarchal bargain."⁹² In the case of Beyoncé, her resistance stems from growing her own economic power and building her brand in a system that has historically silenced women of color, even if that means making some sacrifices in the short term. And, because of her personal brand, Beyoncé has the ability to reach a mass audience of young women unlike almost any other pop icon of her time. Her

⁹¹ Beyoncé Knowles, "'Self-Titled': Part 2. Imperfection," 2:36.

⁹² Kandiyoti, "Bargaining With Patriarchy," 103.

self-titled album, “Beyoncé,” broke the US iTunes sale record in just three days.⁹³ Thus, bell hooks rightly points out that Beyoncé does move people and her songs reach a large audience. And, while her representation of white beauty ideals may limit her appeal to third wave feminists, it also allows her to build a larger platform and direct more fans to intersectional criticism and scholarship—like Chimimanda Adichie. Beyoncé effectively works within the framework of patriarchy to build an audience and a platform in order to subvert the patriarchy with some of her music.

Beyoncé controls her own representation of her body, yet many critics assume that her self-hyper sexualization diminishes her feminist stance. Anna Holmes, founder of Feminist website *Jezebel*, explains, “We don’t often see women in bodysuits writhing around on cars except when—I don’t know, it’s *Maxim* magazine, so it does feel like a performance for the benefit of men.”⁹⁴ What Holmes fails to take into account is that Beyoncé’s primary viewing audience is, in fact, women. A 2014 study by Music Machinery found that while Beyoncé was the third most popular artist for women, she was only the 24th most popular artist for men.⁹⁵ Beyoncé constructs her own image—she owns her own company, directs her own videos and writes her own songs. In an interview on her YouTube channel, she comments on her sexuality in her music video for her song “Partition:” “The day I got engaged was

⁹³ Keith Caulfield, “Beyoncé Leads for Third Week at No. 1 on Billboard Top 200 Chart,” *Billboard*, January 2, 2014, accessed March 15, 2015, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/5855135/beyonce-leads-for-third-week-at-no-1-on-billboard-200-chart>

⁹⁴ Bilal Qureshi, “Feminists Everywhere React To Beyoncé’s Latest,” *NPR* segment, 1:12, December 19, 2013, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/therecord/2013/12/19/255527290/feminists-everywhere-react-to-beyonc-s-latest>

⁹⁵ “Gender Specific Listening,” *Music Machinery*, accessed March 21, 2015, <http://musicmachinery.com/2014/02/10/gender-specific-listening/>

my husband's birthday and I took him to crazy horse. I remember thinking 'Damn. These girls are fly.' I just thought it was the ultimate sexy show I had ever seen and I was like, 'I wish I was up there...' I'm not at all ashamed of being sexual. I'm not embarrassed about it and I don't feel like I have to protect that side of me."⁹⁶ In this comment, Beyoncé acknowledges the provocativeness of her work. She also acknowledges her own desire to be sexual for herself because *she* wants to be. The key here is choice and control—recognizing that women can be sexual for themselves, not for men. By creating a broader body of work on the Internet that builds on and contributes to her already existing work she becomes part of the public of her viewing audience. Her presence in these online spaces allow her to normalize females sexuality as someone who wants to present herself sexually for herself rather than as a sex object. Beyoncé understands the power structures at play and constructs her own image. To see her solely as catering to the male gaze undermines a woman's ability to be sexual for anything other than male attention. Through additional information the viewer gets about Beyoncé in new media settings, the public can learn more about her intentions and her hand in crafting her image. New media in online settings dismantles the power structure of mass media that relies solely on a single moment and a single direction of content production. Returning to Marx's analysis of media and the ruling class, he explains, "This whole appearance, that the rule of a certain class is only the rule of certain ideas, comes to a natural end, of course, as soon as class rule in general ceases to be the form in

⁹⁶ Beyoncé Knowles, "'Self-Titled' Part 4. Liberation," 2:40.

which society is organized.”⁹⁷ By making herself more available in spaces that she has more control over (her personal website, her Youtube channel) Beyoncé is able to dismantle some of the stereotypes about her and articulate her choices in her representation. New media gives her the opportunity to voice her opinion in a way that is not accessible to her in a mass media setting. Where some viewers could read Beyoncé’s content through a patriarchal gaze, she uses her online space to assert and articulate her own agency and her own choices. Her work is about engaging in the creative process with her fans rather than about presenting a final product.

Beyoncé understands the importance of using new media as a tool to engage with her fans. She is a personal brand that exists on and off stage, in public and in private. And, while she often faces criticism for her self-representation, the volume of content she creates on a variety of different multimedia platforms gives her



Figure 2.2 Beyoncé as Rosie the Riveter on Instagram

a more complex public persona. The musician is active on social media, running Tumblr and Instagram accounts that share everything from photoshoots to private family photos to information about causes she supports. Her presence on these sites allows her to create more content and share more than she possibly could in a 2-hour concert or a magazine interview. In the summer of 2014 Beyoncé posted a photo on Instagram of her dressed as Rosie the Riveter in front of a sign that read

⁹⁷ Karl Marx et al, “The Ruling Class and The Ruling Ideas,” 11.

“We Can Do It!” (Figure 2.2).⁹⁸ Rosie the Riveter is a complicated figure in the modern Feminist movement as social movements have continually appropriated and reimagined her to fit a variety of contexts. Historically, Rosie the Riveter served as a symbol of women’s economic power during WWII. As Rosie the Riveter biographers Miriam Frank, Marilyn Zeibarth and Connie Field explain, “For the first time, large numbers of women were paid a decent wage for their labor, were able to produce produces which could be seen and were represented by unions which offered some protection on the job.”⁹⁹ In many ways, Roise the Riveter is a visual representation of Arquette’s appeal—she represents economic prosperity for women in traditionally male dominated fields. However, her physical image only represents a small fraction of the women who entered the workforce in the 1940s. While Rosie appears to be white, Frank, Zeibarth and Field explain, “it [the image of Rosie] ignores the lives of at least two out of three of the women who entered the wartime defense plants. These women welders and riveters had already worked outside their homes for wages. They had been former service and domestic workers... Many were minority women and single mothers.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, Beyoncé’s photo as Rosie the Riveter is inherently political because it creates visibility for the workers who were part of the women’s economic push in the 1940s but have been left out of the historical image. It effectively rewrites historical memory by placing women of color within a historical context of which they have been rendered

⁹⁸ Beyoncé Knowles, *We Can Do It!*, Instagram image, posted by “Beyoncé,” July 2014, accessed March 20, 2015.

⁹⁹ Miriam Frank et al. , “Rosie the Riveter,” *Society Journal* 21 (1984): Issue 3, accessed April 1, 2015, dio: 10.1007/BF02700373

¹⁰⁰ Miriam Frank et al, “Rosie the Riveter,” 1.

invisible. Online spaces allow many people to rewrite content and share it with others. And, because Beyoncé is both the subject of mass media and a new media content creator, she creates the space and the tools for others to engage in cultural critique.

Many feminists have criticized celebrities for representing narrow, simplified versions of feminism in the mass media. However, the nature of mass media that is predicated on certain beauty standards limits the identities that popularity in mainstream media. Mass media can certainly serve as the catalyst for conversation, but new media is essential to deconstruct all of those systems of oppression. People gather around celebs as a public and are able to deconstruct comment on and elaborate on the celebrities content in new media. In the case of Arquette, the attention surrounding her public declaration was just as much about her speech as it was about the way people discussed it in online spaces. Where the Oscars used to be about tuning in to see who wins, now viewers follow along on social media. The public interacts with what they see online in public spaces. Many women actively participated in the event online using the hashtag #AskHerMore, encouraging red carpet reporters to ask women about more than just their dresses. The non-profit and production company, The Representation Project, even created an app that allowed users to send pre-generated tweets to red carpet reporters encouraging them to ask women more. Where television used to be about watching an event or story, it now allows audience interactivity with the content. This means that what content creators and celebrities share in the mass media are merely a starting point for a media experience.

Social media, while a tool for community engagement, also makes each individual the subject of media content for their followers. Each person's content is chronicled, archived and curated. However, celebrities are the subjects of many more peoples' social media content. Their lives and actions are displayed for everyone to see and critique. They, like anyone, grow and learn—but, they do so in the public eye. Beyoncé and Arquette have recently declared themselves feminists in the public. They did with the whole world watching. Yet, they also occupy a space that has historically placed them at the margins. They have had to navigate and reconcile their identity to become part of the center. In working their way through systems of oppression present in the media industry they built up their brand to be able to share their feminist stance with the world. Their feminism may not be perfect now. No one's is. Through critique and conversation hopefully they will continue to grow as feminists and artist. New media offers the tools for dialogue, re-appropriation and rewriting historical memory. Celebrity feminism is but a starting point in mass media that serves as a platform for new media to change the future.

Chapter III

#SelfieSunday:

Self-Promoting Nature of Social Media Informs Communal Social Activism in a #HashtagActivism Age

In 2013, *Oxford Dictionaries* named “selfie” the word of the year.¹⁰¹ The word refers to a self-portrait taken on one’s phone and shared on social media. The act of taking “selfies” has become so popular that many social media users have even designated Sunday *#SelfieSunday*—dedicating their social media posts on Sunday specifically to self-portraits. Popular among teens, people of a variety of genders, ages and communities all log on repeatedly to post these pictures and share snippets of their lives—showing off their new haircut, chronicling places they’ve been and even virtually supporting social movements. Though people gather and communicate in a variety of ways in online settings, the proliferation of selfies in online spaces demonstrates the inherent self-promotional nature of social media that centers on curating one’s own story and sharing it with the world. Where celebrities like Taylor Swift and Beyoncé are often the highlights of media, social media creates a space for individuals to build and share their own platform as well. Social media revolutionizes the way people see their own self-image and the way they interact with a public.

¹⁰¹ Ben Brumfield, “Selfie named word of the year for 2013,” *CNN*, November 20, 2013, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/11/19/living/selfie-word-of-the-year/>.

“Selfies” are not the only trend proliferating social media, *Time Magazine* published an article in 2014 titled, “Behold the Power of #Hashtag Feminism.”¹⁰² *Time* was not alone in their observation that hashtag feminism had a moment in the sun in—*Forbes*, *Ms. Magazine*, *Policy Mic* and *Huffington Post* all chimed in with reviews of the year rounding up hashtags relating to gender equality. Their choice to highlight hashtag feminism in 2014 responds to the sheer volume of high profile hashtag campaigns relating gender equality in the past few years. Most notably campaigns such as #YouOKSis and #RememberRenisha focused their attention on the particular experiences of women of color, the #YesAllWomen and #SurvivorPrivilege brought narratives of sexual assault into popular discourse and #HobbyLobby condensed political discussions into 140 characters or less. Where Twitter provides the platform for a public, individuals often create content specifically for counterpublics to engage with their friend circle or followers. However, situating counterpublics within a wider media space like Twitter forces interaction between both publics and counterpublics that expands counterpublic content to a wider audience.

The popular hashtag *#SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen* is one example of how social media, and Twitter specifically, could be a tool for collaborative social organizing. Writer for *The Guardian*, Mikki Kendall, launched the hashtag in response to supposed feminist ally, Hugo Schwyzer’s, public Twitter meltdown in

¹⁰² Jessica Bennett, “Behold the Power of #Hashtag Feminism,” *Time.com*, September 10, 2014, accessed March 21, 2015, <http://time.com/3319081/whyistayed-hashtag-feminism-activism/>

which he admitted to targeting women of color because they were “in his way,” interfering with his white feminist agenda.¹⁰³ As Kendall explains,

When I launched the hashtag #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, I thought it would largely be a discussion between people impacted by the latest bout of problematic behavior from mainstream white feminists. It was intended to be Twitter shorthand for how often feminists of color are told that the racism they experience “isn't a feminist issue.”¹⁰⁴

The hashtag was meant specifically to target white feminist movements’ and mainstream feminist media outlets’ long-standing failure to address the multiplicity of marginalization many women who are not white, upper/middle-class and heteronormative face. Kendall explains, “Feminism as a global movement meant to unite all women has global responsibilities and—as illustrated by hundreds of tweets—has failed at one of the most basic: it has not been welcoming to all women, or even their communities.”¹⁰⁵ With the tools for every person to be able to share stories and content in media, the hashtag served as a tool for women who have repeatedly been silenced in the movement to publicly share what they want to see for feminism in the future. Bernard states: “The idea of invisibility for the invisible black woman and other women of color in the discussion of women’s search for liberation and/or basic human rights, should be called a crime against humanity... The struggle of women of color has been used as an afterthought in many scholarly and educated layperson conversation.”¹⁰⁶ Twitter (and social media in general)

¹⁰³ Mikki Kendall, “#SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen: women of color’s issue with digital feminism,” *The Guardian*, August 14, 2013, accessed March 30, 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/14/solidarityisforwhitewomen-hashtag-feminism>

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Bernard, *Black & Brown Waves*, 5.

open up the possibility to bring these conversations by and about the women who have been rendered invisible into the public eye. As one Twitter user pointed out, “What does it say that a Twitter hashtag is giving more voice to WOC than feminist orgs and media outlets? #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen.”¹⁰⁷ As the Twitter user acknowledged in her analysis of the hashtag, successful counterpublics bring taboo subjects, or conversations usually only located in the specific sphere of the counterpublic into other spaces. As Warner explains in the context of queer counterpublics, “The expansive nature of public address will seek to keep moving that frontier for a queer public, to seek more and more places to circulate where people will recognize themselves in its address.”¹⁰⁸ Kendall created the #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen hashtag aimed at organizing a specific counterpublic around making their conversations and experiences within the internet public. Women of color very rarely see representations of themselves in media, let alone in mainstream feminist media. In this way, Twitter allowed individuals to create the content they wanted to see represented in the mainstream.

While people have organized around particular social issues for centuries (and around gender equality for over a century in modern America), social organizing through hashtag activism is certainly relatively new in online spaces. These online spaces provide accessibility for individuals to chime in about their own opinions on a particular issue. They offer a mechanism for each person both to share solidarity with what others post and to present their own ideas with the world.

¹⁰⁷ Susana Loza, “Hashtag Feminism, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, and the Other #FemFuture,” *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media and Technology* 5 (2013): 4.

¹⁰⁸ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 120.

However, rooted in social media is the notion that in these online spaces, one curates content to represent the self. According to a study published by University of Alabama Professor of Communication and Information Sciences Guosong Shao, “Producing is essentially the life blood of user-generated sites; without user generated content, user generated media would not exist.”¹⁰⁹ In this context, user generated media (like social media platforms) rely on individuals to perpetuate and create new content. Additionally, anyone who has Internet access can contribute to user-generated media. While hashtag feminism brings certain topics such as the intersectionality of the movement or the particular experiences of women of color into a more mainstream realm of discussion, the constant focus on self-curation and promotion limits the way individuals engage with a larger movement. Thus, while online spaces seem to offer a democratic space where each voice has the same platform, in reality they serve to perpetuate socio-political and cultural barriers within social movements. Content created by marginalized individuals largely circulates within the marginalized community until the privileged mainstream commits to allyship in online spaces. And, returning to Warren’s definition of a “public” (as addressed in the introduction) as a self-organized group around a single platform, online platforms such as Twitter where discourse happens in a multiplicity of ways in a single online space, provide the forum for marginalized groups and privileged groups to engage with each other with the goal of shifting the online cultural space to make it more democratic. #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen

¹⁰⁹ Guosong Shao, “Understanding the appeal of user-generated media: a uses and gratification perspective,” *Internet Research*, 19 (2009): 13.

circulated as a counterpublic within the Twitter public, ultimately shifting the content mainstream outlets produced.

Just as representing and engaging with the self is rooted in social media, self-expression and articulating common experience was essential to the women's liberation movement. During the 1960s and 1970s, many women began gathering and politically organizing through Consciousness Raising (CR) groups made popular by Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*. Yet, rather than a general public organized on a single platform, Consciousness Raising groups were directed at a very specific group of women who had race and class privilege. CR groups were, according to Warren, a counterpublic "socially marked by their participation in this kind of discourse."¹¹⁰ CR groups were created by and for specific people. In her book, Friedan used personal accounts from suburban housewives to articulate gender inequality in America. And, in doing so she directs both her book and the CR groups inspired by it towards a particular audience. Friedan explains, "In 1960, the problem that has no name burst like a boil through the image of the happy *American housewife* [emphasis added]... But the actual unhappiness was suddenly being reported... Although almost everybody who talked about it found some superficial reason to dismiss it."¹¹¹ Her book—a form of media rooted in individual expression and experience—brought the struggle for gender equality for a specific demographic of people (white, suburban housewives) into the public eye. The response to the book encouraged women to socially organize and to bring to the surface the struggles they had been told to suppress. The groups served as a space

¹¹⁰ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 120.

¹¹¹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; repr., New York: Norton, 2001), 22.

for suburban women to name and articulate the ways they experienced sexism. As Letty Cottin Pogrebin, a member of a Consciousness Raising group in the 1970s, explained:

In my prefeminist days I believed only in strong women who went out to change their own lives; women who broke down discrimination barriers by being twice as smart women who didn't need help... Since that time I, like many of us, have become a proselytizer for the consciousness raising process. I gave up the protective device of exempting myself from Woman's Condition... Like a convert to the female sex, I became "us."¹¹²

Here, an experience, rooted in self-expressing gender identity publicly united and mobilized a group of women. Much like social media, which advocates for content creation through self-representation, Consciousness Raising groups helped women turn personal experiences into political ideology, uniting women in shared experience. The book and subsequent organizing had characteristics of social media, yet it was directed and limited in scope. It grew a community rooted in individual experience and personal representation specifically for a particular group of women.

The Consciousness Raising groups that came out of Friedan's work were essential to the second wave feminist movement. However, they formed so widely in part because of the popularity of the book itself. The popularity of the book hinged upon Friedan's ability and positionality to make it part of mass culture. While she had an ambitious and successful career as a journalist after graduating Smith College in 1942, she was forced to leave her job during her second pregnancy and spent her time raising children. Now the wife of an ad executive and suburban

¹¹² Letty Cottin Pogrebin, "Guide to Consciousness Raising," *Ms.* (Spring 1973), reprinted in *Ms.* (Spring 2002), 17.

mother of three she leveraged herself and her positionality within the white middle-class.¹¹³ Because she framed herself within a particular socio-economic demographic of white middle class suburban women who had social capital in consumer culture, she was able to share work with a wide reading audience of other white, middle class, suburban women. Friedan explains, “The suburban housewife—she was the dream image of the young American women and the envy, it was said, of all women over the world... She was healthy, beautiful, educated, concerned only about her husband, her children, her home. She had found true feminine fulfillment.”¹¹⁴ Here, Friedan speaks directly to the life of the American housewife—appealing to their life experiences in order to articulate the power of sexism within white suburbia. Her book was successful in reaching a mass buying and reading audience: it spent six weeks on *The New York Times* best seller list and the initial paperback sold 1.4 million copies.¹¹⁵ By writing specifically about the experiences of middle-class women, she was able to locate a problem within that specific community rather than looking at the experiences of women across race and class backgrounds.

As demonstrated in chapter 1, white women often have more air time in the mass media to address social justice issues. As Regina Andrea Bernard explains in her book, *Black and Brown Waves: The Cultural Politics of Young Women of Color and Feminism*, “While (mis)representation was a major issue of the second wave, along

¹¹³ Marion Kaplan, “Betty Friedan, 1921-2006,” *Jewish Women’s Archive*, Accessed February 12, 2015. <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/friedan-betty>

¹¹⁴ Friedan, *The Feminist Mystique*, 18.

¹¹⁵ Louis Meland, “Books as Bombs: Why the women’s movement needed ‘The Feminist Mystique,’” *The New Yorker*, January 24, 2014. Accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/01/24/books-as-bombs>

with career opportunities and choices, black and brown women were still trying to be recognized... it is important to note that black feminism still stands alone in its own movement where race, class and gender are at the core of the struggle.”¹¹⁶ The success of books like *The Feminist Mystique* brought feminism (a then radical idea) into mass culture. However, the version of feminism Friedan and other second wave feminist leaders presented only took into account experiences of a very particular, privileged group of women. Where suburban housewives struggled to reconcile their identity solely as a caretaker, women from other racial and socio-economic backgrounds struggled to financially support their families while also taking care of their homes. Bernard explains the particular experience of many Latina women: “They have had endless complaints about requirements from their homes and their male partners regarding their lack of cooking skills... or how the home should look... what they should be wearing and religiously-infused rules and regulations of the ‘mujer buena’ (good woman).”¹¹⁷ Their marginalization intersected with gender, race, class and religion. Additionally, just as Bernard acknowledges that women from different backgrounds encounter different marginalizations, not all women in America find the type of meetings CR groups provide to be an accessible or a productive form of gathering. As feminist icon and first female chief of the Cherokee Nation Wilma Mankiller explains, “When indigenous women gather in our homes, at ceremonial grounds or at meetings, our conversations are often quite different than those with non-Native people. Not only do we often speak of different things, we

¹¹⁶ Bernard, *Black & Brown Waves*, 1-7.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 11.

speak about them in an entirely different way.”¹¹⁸ These very different experiences of marginalization and different organizing strategy has meant that not all women’s experiences resonate with the content like *The Feminine Mystique* that reflects the sexism specifically privileged women face. Therefore, rather than serving as content that hosts a large, diverse public, CR groups have historically served a specific counterpublic and circulated within that counterpublic of white, privileged woman and pushing other women to the margins.

Moving into the third wave of the Feminist movement, many key leaders made it their mission to incorporate intersectional voices and agendas into the movement. As Bernard explains:

In the 1990s, the third wave of feminism arrived into the forefront of the longstanding concern surrounding women’s issues. It was a direct response to the lacking concern on a variety of issues that the first and second waves blew off. Although there was massive activist work being done in the first and second waves... there was a lack of attention given to issues of race and class as they are linked to gender.¹¹⁹

It thus became the project of the third wave feminist movement to incorporate intersectional goals about race, class, ability and gender into its mission. Rooted in the third wave of the feminist movement is the goal of understanding that feminist activism regarding sexism must intersect with activism about race, class, ability, cisnormativity and any other marginalizations. For example, the conversation in the third wave about women in the workforce was no longer just about keeping women in the workforce. Instead, the third wave of feminism aims to shift the conversation to be about keeping women in the workforce, making sure women make as much

¹¹⁸ Wilma Mankiller, *Every Day is a Good Day: Reflections by Contemporary Indigenous Women*, (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 2004) xxv.

¹¹⁹ Bernard, *Black & Brown Waves*, 6.

money for the same work as men and ensuring *all* women have access to high-paying jobs. Rather than assume commonality and address the challenges for a specific group of women, the third waves aims to center the struggles of all women in the feminist movement.

With the growth of the Internet, feminist leaders have a variety of tools to share the intersectional experiences of women. And, where women used to gather in different ways and around different issues, the platform locates all conversations in the same space, bringing people together as an entire public and inserting the discourse of the counterpublics into the platform itself. As American Studies Scholar, Erica L. Williams explains, “Twitter hashtags can bring together the dialogue between public figures and its average users. Since its inception in March of 2006, Twitter has become a new and innovative platform for social movements and political dialogue.”¹²⁰ Social media provides individuals with the power to share and consume content made by any person with an Internet connection, without a lot of funding or large amounts of equipment. It effectively creates a space for people to share ideas they are passionate about. And when used in a way that reinforces sharing and collaboration, it can be highly successful in bringing marginalized stories into the mainstream. Where Friedan relied on the buying power of the middle class to consume and share her work, people can share hashtags with the click of a button.

¹²⁰ Erica L. Williams, “Black Feminism, Hashtags, and the Importance of Twitter to American Studies,” *Digital America* 3 (2014), 2, Accessed February 25, 2015. <http://www.digitalamerica.org/black-feminism-hashtags-and-the-importance-of-twitter-to-american-studies-amanda-lineberry/>

Both Twitter and CR groups hinge on personal participation on the platform and within the group. Where the success of Consciousness Raising groups relied on building a community, CR groups built a foundation on individual stories. According to sociologist Jo Reger's study on the psychological affects of Consciousness Raising groups:

With its [Consciousness Raising groups] focus on structural, not individual, explanations of inequality, C-R transforms women's anger, alienation, frustration and hopelessness by illustrating the similarities in their experiences. The goal is for participants to have a "click" experience as the result of a series of discussion questions that address issues ranging from housework to sexual relationships. In NYC NOW's C-R, a "click" is the moment of an individual's realization of societal inequities prompted by a group interaction through an organizational process.¹²¹

While the success of Consciousness Raising groups relied on collective group identity, they required work on the part of each individual to voice their concerns and connect with other women. Each woman had to be open and willing to share her own experiences in order to build a group identity. As one Consciousness Raising group organizer explained, "Well, the key to consciousness-raising is to say 'I.' 'It is my experience and my feelings that the consciousness comes from, not yours, not my mother's, not my sister's, not my best friends, but mine'... It raises your consciousness. Because you hear me... I'm saying I did this. That is a big difference and that's the key to consciousness-raising."¹²² By rooting discussions within personal experience, women were not forced to speak for each other or assume all women would face the same struggles. Rather, each woman identified

¹²¹ Jo Reger, "Organizational "Emotion Work" Through Consciousness-Raising: An Analysis of a Feminist Organization," *Qualitative Sociology* 27, No. 2 (2004), 214. DOI: 10.1177/0891243209335412

¹²² Reger, "Organizational "Emotion Work" Through Consciousness-Raising: An Analysis of a Feminist Organization," 211.

her own similarities and differences among the other members of the group. Just as Consciousness Raising groups created a community they relied both on women feeling comfortable enough to honestly share their own struggles and stories with other women in order to find commonality and on the expectation that other women shared the same experiences.

While Kentall may have intended the hashtag #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen as critique of the feminist movement as a whole by specifically directing criticism at Schwyzer and his supporters, the hashtag relied heavily on individual involvement and on self-expression. Kendall explains, “Many users commented on how therapeutic it was to voice publicly their issues. So, in that way, it has been healing for some people.”¹²³ Rather than solely a method of critiquing others and critiquing media, the hashtag and the media provided space for women of color to talk about their selves and their own positionality in the movement. In an interview with Kendall published on *bitchmagazine.com*, interviewer Tina Vazquez explains: “[#SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen] inadvertently gave women of color permission to express the pain of being silenced and ignored and dismissed, of being relegated to a footnote in the movement that promised sisterhood.”¹²⁴ While, women of color do not, and should not, need permission to express their personal struggles, Vazquez is right to point out that the hashtag gave many women an organized forum to do so.

¹²³ Kendall, “#SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen: women of color’s issue with digital feminism.”

¹²⁴ Tina Vazquez, “Why ‘Solidarity’ is Bullshit,” *BitchMagazine.com*, August 16, 2013, accessed February 21, 2015. <http://bitchmagazine.org/post/why-solidarity-is-bullshit>

The basis of social media that was about making personal lives public allowed for critique from the position of one's own lived experience.

Individual expression rooted in critique can be particularly helpful in articulating and evaluating social structures that create marginalization. In anti-racist and feminist scholar Peggy McIntosh's iconic essay, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack of White Privilege" she recounts her experience as a white person in order to explain how white privilege and racism operate in America. By speaking from her own experience she is able to locate her own positionality within the racist framework of America. She concludes in her essay that in order to change racism in America individuals need to name privilege in the same way that they name marginalization. She explains that that kind of acknowledgment will lead to people actively working to reframe the country: "And so one question for me and others like me is whether we will be like them [male academics who do not see the importance of studying gender], or will we get truly distressed, even outraged, about the unearned race advantage and conferred dominance, and, if so, what will we do to lessen them."¹²⁵ While McIntosh worked to name privilege and the women using the #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen hashtag are working to bring attention to marginalization, they are both doing so through locating and sharing their own personal experience.

While Consciousness Raising groups did provide a place for women to share their personal experiences within a community, they also mobilized a community

¹²⁵ Peggy McIntosh, "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack of White Privilege," reprinted on *The Feminist EZine*, n.d.. Accessed February 25, 2015. <http://www.feministezine.com/feminist/modern/WhitePrivilege-MalePrivilege.html>

and brought formerly taboo topics into the realm of public conversation. As social political analysts Joanne Howes and Amy Allina explain in their article, “Women’s Health Movements,” Consciousness Raising groups made women’s reproductive health a public conversation. According to Howes and Allina,

Women in consciousness-raising groups and other outgrowths of women's liberation began to question the medical establishment. Women who were beginning to have a sense of personal empowerment asked doctors to explain the medical facts of diseases and their treatments, and because they were dissatisfied with the answers, women began to research and discuss the questions among themselves.¹²⁶

This public discussion culminated in a book titled Our Bodies, Ourselves by the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective. According to Howes and Allina, the book was meant as a tool to share the knowledge and power the authors gained from experiences learning about women’s bodies and health. This use of personal experience to educate other women harkens back to the experience of Consciousness Raising groups’ use personal experience as the basis for community building. While organized by specific counterpublics, they brought their particular political objectives into the public.

While Twitter, like CR groups, hinges on individual expression, hashtags make it possible to find communities organizing around similar interests. They place counterpublic organized around specific hashtags in a larger public. When used as a search tool, hashtags can help unite communities across time, positionality and physical space. Yet, while Kendall intended the hashtag to get the intention of white feminists and media, the emphasis on selfhood and individual experience in

¹²⁶ Joanne Howes et al., 1994. “Women’s health movements.” *Social Policy* 24, no 4:6-14 (1994), Academic Search Premier, accessed February 14, 2014.

social media prevented the hashtag from fully, productively critique and engage the white feminist audience. For many women of color, the hashtag succeeded uniting and mobilizing a group of women because their experience was rooted in sameness and thus seeing the their own story reflected in someone else's. However, instead of sameness, engaging white feminists required white feminists to recognize and value different lived experiences. Returning to Warner's understanding of the problematic nature of counterpublics operating solely within their own demographic Warner explains: "It [counterpublic content] might therefore circulate in special, protected, venues, in limited publications."¹²⁷ This circulatory nature of counterpublics means that unless they interact with other counterpublics or within other publics, they become limited in scope and reach. As professor of English at Purdue University, Roxane Gay, explains: "We cannot consider the needs of women without also accounting for race, ethnicity, gender, citizenship, class, sexuality, ability and more. Such nuanced awareness, such intersectionality, is the marrow within the bones of feminism. Without it, feminism will fracture even further."¹²⁸ Gay's appeal means that in order to address intersectionality white feminists must reconcile their own version of feminism with an understanding of feminism that incorporates the intersecting identities of women from all different races and classes. This reconciliation presents some challenges in a social media setting when so much of how and what people share is rooted in self-image and personal experience, because

¹²⁷ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 120

¹²⁸ Roxane Gay, "Looking For A Better Feminism," *NPR.com*, August 23, 2013, accessed March 15, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/codeswitch/2013/08/22/214525023/twitter-sparks-a-serious-discussion-about-race-and-feminism>

it means that as true allies white women must be willing to support experiences with which they do not necessarily identify.

While #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen got quite a bit of attention, especially within the feminist community that already actively worked to critique mainstream feminism, hashtag circulation requires publicity from its inception. That is, hashtags require someone who already has a large following—a culture maker—to spread the message and encourage others to participate. As professor of Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario Alison Hearn explains in her article, “Brand Me ‘Activist,’” looking specifically at websites about climate change: “The logic pervades the sites’ aesthetic and political parameters and their core assumptions about their interlocutors’, or users’, ‘self-defined political agency... These sites use a highly individualized mode of address, which assumes the desire of individuals to self-brand as ‘activist’ through the process of active consumption and celebrity emulation.”¹²⁹ While she refers to websites, the same logic applies to Twitter. Twitter users choose whom to follow based on their interests, and celebrities have some of the most followers on the platform. The site allows users to personalize the content they see and centers on emulating the people they follow with the goal of attaining the most followers, retweets and favorites. Therefore, celebrities with a large number of followers have the significant ability to bring important critiques into the mainstream by highlighting what social media users are sharing and offering up their own critiques as well. However, in the case of intersectional feminist criticism, that means engaging with the mainstream they are actively

¹²⁹ Alison Hearn, “Brand Me Activist,” in *Commodity Activism* ed. Roopali Mukherjee et al., (New York, New York University Press, 2012) 30.

critiquing and relying on the mainstream to promote their cause. This interactivity is because the hashtag system relies on the public liking and sharing the hashtag. If someone with cultural capital shares a hashtag or retweets a tweet online, they have the ability to reach a much broader audience of potential Twitter users who will favorite and re-tweet the content. In the case of #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, their criticism was in direct response to mainstream feminist websites like *Jezebel* and *Feministe*. With Jezebel having 232,000 followers alone, they have the ability to reach a large number of people. While hashtags have the ability to build community and allow individuals to share their own experiences, the real power to affect a large number of people rests in the hands of the people who already have a large following. Thus, intersectional feminists need to appeal to mainstream in order to get their message out in the mass public. This interactivity between the mainstream and counterpublics on the public platform of Twitter demonstrates how counterpublics can affect and shift the mainstream.

While appealing to mass media may undermine the power of individual voices, mass media attention actually falls in line with what the hashtag #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen was trying to accomplish: they were attempting to alter the mainstream. As Mikki Kendall explains in an interview on *The Huffington Post Live*, "This was not a one-time bad interaction... In that time white feminists... gave him a platform."¹³⁰ Thus they used the hashtag to dismantle that platform. A

¹³⁰ Mikki Kendall, "#SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen Creator, Mikki Kendall, Speaks About Women Of Color, Feminism (VIDEO)," *Huffington Post Live*, August 13, 2013, 2:10. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/13/solidarityisforwhitewomen-creator-mikki-kendal-women-of-color-feminism-_n_3749589.html

few days after Kendall launched the hashtag, *Jezebel* ran an article titled, “Our Favorite #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen Tweets” in which they featured ten powerful tweets using the hashtag. Thus, in many ways, the hashtag succeeded in accomplishing their end goal of bringing their ideas into the mainstream and altering the content they took issue with to begin with. However, the article makes no attempt to acknowledge the problem at hand—media outlets continuing to perpetuate a version of feminism primarily geared at privileged women. As one commenter mentioned, “Hmm... No mention of the situation that precipitated the hashtag, in which Jezebel is complicit? Okay.”¹³¹ Where the hashtag succeeded in bringing attention to the institutional problems in a narrow definition of feminism, it failed to encourage media outlets to engage in the self-reflective process of publicly taking responsibility for contributing to the problem. Thus, in the interest of self-promotion for *Jezebel*, this article gives the illusion that *Jezebel* is supporting something really radical and powerful without taking any responsibility for producing problematic, marginalizing content to begin with.

While communities are organizing in online settings with hashtags, formal CR groups are still active today as a way to build community. Following the release of Sheryl Sandberg’s book, *Lean In*, she established “Lean In Circles.” The circles serve as a space where women can gather to discuss their experiences in the workplace. Any woman can start a circle by signing up through the Lean In website and building a community of women. The website boasts, “Circles are unique as the

¹³¹ NinjaCate, August 13, 2013 (6:06 pm), comment on Erin Gloria Ryan, “Our Favorite #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen Tweets,” *Jezebel*, August 13, 2013, accessed April 15, 2015. <http://jezebel.com/our-favorite-solidarityisforwhitewomen-tweets-1125272401>

individuals that start them, but they all share a common bond: the power of peer support.”¹³² Like the Consciousness Raising groups of the 1960s, “Lean In Circles” rely on individual participation in order to create a common bond among the members. Sandberg’s use of this framework that mimics the structure of Consciousness Raising groups demonstrates that CR remain a useful form of cultural critique today. They, like original CR groups, appeal to a particular demographic of people, serving as a counterpublic, rather than a public conversation. While demographics statistics participants in “Lean in Circles” is not available for the public, “Lean In Circles” use a curriculum created by the Lean In foundation relating specifically to topics covered in Sandberg’s book. And, while open to anyone to participate, some marginalized women have voiced concern about the kind of leadership Sandberg advocates for in her book. Commenting on Sandberg’s follow up book, *Lean In for Graduates*, blogger Feminista Jones states, “Less than a third of the American adult population are college graduates... What about the rest of the women... who aren’t even getting to places where they are graduates of anything and yet they still have to provide for their families?”¹³³ The foundation of Sandberg’s work, which assumes women have access to certain resources like education, excludes many women who are from different race and class backgrounds from benefiting from and connecting with the business model and leadership strategies Sandberg proposes. Sandberg’s work may be flawed in scope and theory, yet many feminist scholars still recognize the importance of Consciousness Raising groups in

¹³² “Lean In Circles,” *LeanIn.org*, accessed February 13, 2015. www.leanincircles.org

¹³³ Caroline Modarressy-Tehrani, “Does Sheryl Sandberg’s ‘Lean In’ Ignore Women Of Color?,” *Huff Post Live*, June 5, 2014, accessed April 12, 2014, <http://live.huffingtonpost.com/r/archive/segment/5390c7d0fe3444d43100031e>

helping women articulate and understand patriarchy. bell hooks explains the benefits of CR groups as a space where disagreement and discussion take place: “Only through discussion and disagreement could we begin to find a realistic standpoint on gender exploitation.”¹³⁴ This kind of conversation happens only when a diverse group of women from a variety of backgrounds learn from and share with each other. If Sandberg’s work only applies to a small demographic of privileged women, the conversations it facilitates only engages that small privileged group as well, circulating ideas and information within the counterpublic rather than intersecting those conversations to a wider community.

Much like Consciousness Raising groups that continued long past the second wave feminist movement, Twitter users still use the hashtag #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen to engage in social critique. On February 6th, 2015—nearly two years after Kendall launched the initial hashtag—one Twitter user tweeted, “So this happened. And no mainstream person seems to be talking about it. And it’s not OK. #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen.” Imbedded in the Tweet was a link to an article titled, “Rosie O’Donnell lashes out at feminists of ‘The Vagina Monologues’” from *The Daily Dot*. Certainly, Twitter users do not use the hashtag as much as they used to when Kendall initially launched it. This change in use is in large part due the fact that Twitter and hashtags are based on trends. Something that could be really popular one day may not be popular the next. Therefore, it is really difficult to organize sustained critique. As Williams explains, “The more times a tweet is favorite or retweeted, the more priority it gets on other news feeds. If

¹³⁴ hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, 8.

favorite and retweeted enough, a tweet may go viral, meaning that it shows up on all of your friends' feeds and perhaps on their friends' feeds... Tweets are ephemeral and hard to capture..."¹³⁵ Given this rapid and unpredictable fluctuation, the fact that people are still using the hashtag two years later—after many other hashtags have risen and fallen in popularity too—means that this hashtag was successful in creating a forum for sustained critique. Additionally, rather than in-person meetings that are contingent on group planning and execution, the hashtag serves as a tool to address a public for as long as people want to use it or deem it relevant.

Social media is rooted in presenting the self, in presenting one's life for others to see. But, social media is also about building a community. Facebook users log on to Facebook to hang out with their "friends." Twitter users tweet to interact with their "followers." YouTube users create content for their subscribers. Ever present in the self-expressive nature of social media is the constant growth of community. This makes social media the ideal place for social organizing. In this way, they are emulating the second wave feminist movement that grew out of Consciousness Raising groups that provided both a space for women to share their own experiences while becoming part of a larger community. The political action that resulted from these groups was deeply rooted in individuals' shared experiences. New technology has made it possible for individuals to share their experiences and be part of a community without being in the same physical space. Hashtags like #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen demonstrate the potential for social media to be used as a self-reflexive tool for cultural criticism. The self-expressive

¹³⁵ Williams, "Black Feminism, Hashtags, and the Importance of Twitter to American Studies, Amanda Linberry," 2.

nature of social media encourages participation by individuals while the use of the hashtag unites the larger community in the online space. Twitter presents a democratic space where everyone has the opportunity to share their voice and their struggles with an audience. Where communities build counterpublics out of a shared, common experience, Twitter brings each counterpublic into the same space to interact with each other. For the third wave of the feminist movement that guides itself by engaging in pro-intersectional critique, this democratic space is an invaluable platform for the marginalized women whose voices have historically been silenced within the white feminist movement. Within mass media where certain voices are privileged over others, social media creates a space where any individual with a smart phone or a computer can publicly engage in cultural critique in a way that places their words in the same physical space as those who have more cultural power, bringing their thoughts and ideas to the center of a conversation from which they have long been excluded.

Conclusion

Millions of people log on to social media platforms every day to connect with their friends, learn about events in their community and keep up with the news. Social media is a space for individuals to both learn about the world and provide their own commentary for the community with whom they are connected. However, while social may be a place for individuals to share their voice, it is also a space for people to interact with celebrities and appropriate their cultural capital for their own use, either by talking with them directly or by commenting on their work. Advertising, celebrity content and hashtags are distinctly different forms of communicating a message to a large audience. Advertising sells a consumer product, celebrity content builds a personal brand and hashtags organize and build communities. Yet, at the present moment, all three forms of communication are united by their presence in online spaces.

While online communities are a convention of contemporary technology, the conversation regarding what constitutes feminism has been at the forefront of the feminist movement since women began organizing in modern America. Many of the first and second wave feminist leaders' focus on common experience excluded women who encountered marginalization in a multiplicity of ways. This long-term exclusion led to a narrow definition of feminism and women as a whole that only recognized the experiences of some women. As bell hooks supports, "Throughout American history, the racial imperialism of whites has supported the custom of scholars using the term 'women' even if they are referring solely to the experience

of white women.”¹³⁶ In an attempt to expand both the definition of “women” and the overarching goals of the feminist movement, leading into the third wave of feminism many feminist leaders made it their objective to center intersectional critique in the politics of the movement. hooks set the tone, following in the footsteps of women like Sojourner Truth and Audre Lorde, urging: “Women must recognize the need for reorganization... we must now work to change its direction so that women of all classes can see that their interest in ending sexist oppression is served by the feminist movement.”¹³⁷ hooks calls not just for a re-evaluation of the definition of feminism, but for a large-scale reorganizing of the movement itself, shifting who controls the movement and how it operates. The goal of reorganizing, according to hooks and to many of her supporters, is to shift power structures so that any woman who is marginalized in any way can identify and organize with the movement. Thus, re-organization would redress the long-standing organization that led to fractured, paralleled versions of feminism all organizing at the same time, but on different principles and in different ways.

While feminist leaders may want to reorganize the movement politically, distributing ideas and information to a mass audience relies on a venue to do so. Media is one way of communicating a message to an audience. However, in the context of mass media that often reflect many of the same structural problems as the first and second wave feminist movement, navigating that system requires dismantling it, too. Mass media, as demonstrated in Chapter I, privileges race,

¹³⁶ bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 8.

¹³⁷ hooks, *Feminism Is For Everyone*, 163.

gender, ability and class. As Media theorist Andi Zeisler explains in her book *Feminism and Pop Culture*, “For a long time they [women] didn’t see much besides loving wives, dutiful daughters, gossiping girlfriends, fashion plates and the occasional dowdy maid, nanny or granny [on television].”¹³⁸ Thus, women in the mass media often represent a very narrow version of white, privileged women and are at the constant service of men. Within the mass media, creating a movement based on deconstructing patriarchal structures requires finding a mode of communication to a mass audience that is not rooted in preserving the patriarchy. A reflection of the social structure in which it gained power that privileges race, gender and class, mass media cannot adequately serve as the primary source of social organizing content.

Mass media may be limited in what it can represent because of its structure rooted in sexist oppression; however, new media provides opportunities for individuals to deconstruct that structure. New media, as a form of communication accessible to anyone who has Internet access, allows for a more democratic exchange of ideas in a media setting. New media allows individuals to expand on and critique mass media content. Internet users can comment on new media advertisements, critique celebrities and politically organize in conscious opposition to mass media content. As Antonio López explains in the context of environmentalism, “Every media portal offers the chance for individuals to make the choice of whether to perpetuate the system of conquest and destruction or to become part of a greater evolution in which consciousness and connection build an

¹³⁸ Zeisler, *Feminism and Pop Culture*, 9.

Earth Democracy.”¹³⁹ Thus, new media allows people to consciously connect to one another so that communities can organize around critiques as counterpublics to mass media content. Because anyone with access to the internet can generate content, a more diverse group of people have the ability to make content for the new media space, allowing for a wider variety of ideas and critiques in the mediasphere.

The accessibility of mass media means that more people can create and share content, like sixteen-year-old Amandla Stenberg. At the beginning of 2015, Stenberg posted a homemade video to her personal Tumblr account titled, “Don’t Cash Crop My Cornrows.” In the video, Stenberg explains the significance of cultural appropriation in pop culture as a project for her high school history class. Nearly three months later, the video circulated widely on social media with online news sources commending Stenberg for speaking so articulately and poignantly about cultural appropriation. Stenberg, in addition being a high school student is also the young girl who captured the hearts of many young adult *Hunger Games* fans in the iconic role of “Rue” in the first *Hunger Games* movie. Thus, the headlines read, “Watch This *Hunger Games* Star Give Master Class on Cultural Appropriation.”¹⁴⁰ In the video, Stenberg takes a pro-intersectional feminist stance, urging her peers to contemplate the problematic nature of adopting culturally significant beauty rituals and commodifying them into something trendy. Stenberg explains, “Appropriation occurs when a style leads to racist generalizations or stereotypes where it

¹³⁹ Antonio López, *The Media Ecosystem: What Ecology Can Teach Us About Responsible Media Practice*, xiii.

¹⁴⁰ Derrick Clifton, “Watch This ‘Hunger Games’ Star Give a Master Class on Cultural Appropriation,” *Mic.com*, published April 15, 2015, accessed April 15, 2015, <http://mic.com/articles/115604/amandla-stenberg-rue-from-the-hunger-games-perfectly-explains-cultural-appropriation>

originated, but is deemed as high fashion, cool, or funny when the privileged take it for themselves. Appropriation occurs when the appropriator is not aware of the deep significance of the culture that they are partaking in.”¹⁴¹ Stenberg’s analysis is relevant to an understanding of feminism as a movement aiming to organize around intersections of marginalization. And, while she provides a working definition of cultural appropriation for many of her fans, she also appeals to the publics united by other celebrities’ content, pointing out the way her peers like Miley Cyrus and Taylor Swift tokenize women of color in their music videos. In Stenberg’s short video she accomplishes bell hook’s goal of bringing marginalized experiences to the center of the social activism, she generates a counter public in direct critique of fellow celebrities and she does so by leveraging her own cultural capital as someone who already harnesses a public audience. And, by placing her content in an online space where anyone has access to it, she leaves it open for people to critique and discuss. Nearly three months after posting the video on her Tumblr page, over 64,000 people had already liked or re-blogged it, allowing her fans to use and share her work with their communities, too. Stenberg’s initial cultural capital allowed her to start a mass conversation that engaged a large public. And, because of the interactivity of new media, that public was able to share and elaborate on her work, bringing an understanding of social organizing rooted in combating intersecting marginalizations to a wide public of consumers.

¹⁴¹ Amandla Stenberg, “Don’t Cash Crop My Cornrows,” Tumblr video, 3:40, posted by “Clandesteen,” posted February, 2015, accessed April 10, 2015, <http://clandesteen.tumblr.com/post/107484511963/dont-cash-crop-my-cornrows-a-crash-discourse-on>

As Stenberg's work demonstrates, new media serves as a tool for community building and communication. However celebrities in online spaces are not only a conversation starter. The public uses their brand and their identity to propel political action. While critiquing Hillary Clinton's stance on access to women's reproductive health, *Fox News'* Jesse Waters coined the term "Beyoncé Voters." Waters explained, "She needs the single ladies' vote. I call them the 'Beyoncé Voters.'"¹⁴² Here, Waters uses Beyoncé's identity and brand as a political dig at a specific demographic of voters, organizing a counter public in conscious opposition to Hillary Clinton's politics while interacting on a public united by Beyoncé's content. Waters continues, "They depend on government because they're not depending on their husbands... They want things like contraception, health care, and they love to talk about things like equal pay."¹⁴³ Here, Waters identifies for his audience a specific demographic of people that have historically been marginalized in both the political process and in American society as a whole. Looking specifically at his comments on equal pay, based on an understanding of the wage gap that acknowledges the difference in the pay for women of color and queer women in comparison to white women, Waters situates "Beyoncé Voters" as women who have historically been marginalized in ways in addition to gender. In an attempt to discredit both Hillary Clinton's policies and Beyoncé as a culturally agentic celebrity her further discredits the political power in marginalized communities.

¹⁴² Jesse Waters, "Fox News on Beyoncé Voters," YouTube Video, 0:20, posted by "ThinkProgress Video," July 1, 2014, accessed April 19, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=23&v=CBcMW2q_pQg

¹⁴³ Ibid, 0:30.

While some rallied along side Waters in support of his political point, others appropriated the term for their own use. Waters' comments inspired the Tumblr page "Beyoncé Voters." Much like the Twitter account @FeministTaylorSwift, the creators of the Tumblr page "Beyoncé Voters" connect Beyoncé's iconic lyrics to



Figure 4.1 NuvaRing – Beyoncé Voters



Figure 4.2, Hillary Clinton – Beyoncé Voters

images of female politicians and images about women's reproductive health (figures 5.1 and 5.2). While Beyoncé and her team did not create the account or produce any of the content, the creator of the account (who has remained anonymous) appropriated the Beyoncé brand with the combination of iconic Beyoncé lyrics and the signature Beyoncé pale-pink font. This use of a combination of images of political figures (including Hillary Clinton), images about reproductive health and the Beyoncé brand appropriates Waters' term and generates an entirely new counter public also united in the Beyoncé public. But this time, the counterpublic organized around the Tumblr account directly opposes Waters' remarks. As Georgia State Representative Stacey Abrams summarizes: "It [The 'Beyoncé Voter' idea] was a pejorative to

say that ‘Beyoncé Voters’ are single women who are dependent on government and are less likely to be engaged in the body politic... What it’s been reversed to be is a representation of women as a powerful force in voting.”¹⁴⁴ This reversal demonstrates the political and cultural power in those who have historically been rendered politically powerless in American society.

Though the initial term, “Beyoncé Voters” came out of Waters’ statements in mass media, new media social platforms allowed women to re-appropriate the term to shift it into something else. This constant appropriation of the Beyoncé brand by a wide variety of people with different agendas generates a conversation within the Beyoncé public. Yet, “Beyoncé Voters” serves as more than simply entertainment or banter. Politicians today are using it to rally a voting block leading into the 2016 election. As Abrams explains, “Beyoncé in herself is a powerful woman who not only reflects what she wants, but understands that she’s responsible for securing the things that she needs in her life. Getting Beyoncé voters to understand and own their power I think is the future of this country.”¹⁴⁵ Abram’s comments demonstrate the power in cultural capital—especially Beyoncé’s cultural capital. Thus, tapping into a demographic of women who identify with the Beyoncé brand and engage with Beyoncé’s personal politics can lead to political action. Essentially, Beyoncé is generating both a public of people and a political tool for others to use as they see fit simply by creating and sharing content and by making that content accessible to people to appropriate.

¹⁴⁴ “Here’s What ‘Beyoncé Voters’ Really Want from the Government,” YouTube Video, 2:38, posted by “Mic,” April 7, 2015, Accessed April 18, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uC6z2NbzdU>

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 3:30.

With new media and groundbreaking technology, media content is literally at people's fingertips to consume, engage with and comment on. Returning to Susan J. Douglas's argument for studying media, Douglas established that "if enough people think studying media is a waste of time, then the media get off the hook for doing what they do best: promoting a white, upper-middle class view of the world."¹⁴⁶ Studying media remains an important tool to hold mass media accountable for perpetuating systems of oppression. However, with the accessibility of new media, media itself presents the tools for social organizing necessary to deconstruct systems of oppression that exist within social movements like the feminist movement and within society as a whole. Just as media cannot be overlooked as an area of study, new media cannot be overlooked as a political tool. New media (and especially its intersection with popular culture), while fun and engaging, has the ability to reach a mass audience and engage a mass audience in inherently political conversations. New media reaches people where they are through content with which they already engage and brings political conversations into people's everyday lives by interaction with mass media-based publics. Facebook may sometimes be highlight reels of people's lives, Tweets are snippets of thoughts and advertising in online spaces exists to sell a product, but they occupy a media space that not only hinges on interactivity, but also has a large base of people actively engaging in it. The pervasiveness and accessibility of new media means that it is far more than entertainment—it is a political tool. And, when used effectively, it has the potential to dismantle systems of oppression in mass media and in human interaction. The

¹⁴⁶ Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*, 11.

feminist movement has a long history of exclusion and marginalization of certain identities. Yet, with the tools to engage with the capital and the publics of the most culturally powerful people in the present moment, new media serves as a tool to bring those who have been pushed to the margins of the feminist movement to the center of mass political organization.

Appendix – Citations of Images

Introduction

Figure 0.1 – Taylor Swift, “Shake It Off”

Taylor Swift, “Shake It Off,” Youtube screenshot, posted by “TaylorSwiftVevo,” August 18, 2014, accessed April 18, 2015.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfWlot6h_JM

Chapter I

Figure 1.1 – *Nutrigrain* Ad

Nutrigrain, “Respect Yourself,” Advertisement, Reed College Faculty Multimedia Lab, Altering Female Bodies, Accessed November 28, 2014.

<http://academic.reed.edu/anthro/faculty/mia/Images/Gallery/Pics/NutriGrainRespectYourself.jpg>

Figure 1.2 – *Pop Chip* Ad

About-Face Media Blog, “Katy Perry For Pop Chips: Is it even about Flavor anymore?”, October 18, 2013, accessed November, 28, 2014. <http://www.about-face.org/katy-perry-for-pop-chips-is-food-even-about-flavor-anymore/>

Figure 1.3 – *Tom Ford* Ad

Gender and Society Blog, “Phallic Bottles on Fragmented Bodies, Or Tom Ford For Men 2007,” University of Philadelphia, October 13, 2013, accessed November 28, 2014. <https://genderandsociety2013.wordpress.com/2013/10/27/phallic-bottles-on-fragmented-bodies-or-tom-ford-for-men-2007/>

Figure 1.4 – *Tampax* Ad

Advertising in the City Blog, “How Low Can You Go?”, Accessed November 28, 2014. <https://advertisinginthecity.wordpress.com/2011/04/08/how-low-can-you-go/>

Figure 1.5 – *Broomsticks* Ad

Dominic Green, “15 Ads That Glorify Sexual Assault Against Women,” *Business Insider*. May 18, 2013, accessed November 20, 2014.

<http://www.businessinsider.com/sex-violence-against-women-ads-2013-5>

Figure 1.6 – *Dolce & Gabbana* Ad

Green, “15 Ads That Glorify Sexual Assault Against Women.”

Chapter II

Figure 2.1 – Beyoncé at the MTV Video Music Awards

Alexis Nadeska, “Beyoncé’s 2014 VMA Performance: Fearless, Feminist, Flawless, Family Time,” *MTV*, August 25, 2014, accessed March 20, 2015.
<http://www.mtv.com/news/1910270/beyonce-2014-vma-perfomance/>

Figure 2.2 – Beyoncé as Rosie the Riveter On Instagram

Beyoncé Knowles, “We Can Do It,” photograph, *Instagram*,
<https://instagram.com/p/qwWCsgPw7N/?taken-by=beyonce>

Conclusion

Figure 4.1 – Nuvaring – Beyoncé Voters

Beyoncé Voters Blog, “If You Liked It Then You Shoulda Put A Ring On It,” *Tumblr*, July 2014, accessed April 16, 2015.
<http://beyoncevoters.tumblr.com/post/91759035899>

Figure 4.2 – Hillary Clinton – Beyoncé Voters

Beyoncé Voters Blog, “**Flawless,” *Tumblr*, July 2014, accessed April 16, 2015.
<http://beyoncevoters.tumblr.com/post/91268481607>

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