Platform Feminism: Celebrity Culture and Activism in the Digital Age

by

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Table of Contents

List of Images

Rashida Jones, Tina Tchen, Melina Matsoukas, Nina Shaw, Ava DuVernay, Maha Dakhil Jackson, and Natalie Portman at the Makers Women Conference.

Abstract

Platform Feminism: Celebrity Culture and Activism in the Digital Age tells the story of digital platforms' role in the feminist movement during the early 21st century. Taking celebrity culture as a potent site at which to analyze the new visibilities of feminism and its responses to a new wave of conservative and deeply reactionary politics, I explore the ways in which networked publics coalesce around celebrity events and, in discussing, analyzing, and critiquing various actors within these events, engage in boundary work around what it means to "be a feminist." From responses to celebrity harassment to hashtag campaigns supporting celebrity feminism to critiques of imperfect feminist celebrities, this dissertation explores the contentious debates about feminism that arise around celebrity culture within digital spaces.

     To analyze these discourses, this project draws together literature from three often-disparate academic subfields: platform studies, feminist media studies, and celebrity studies. Using a case study approach, each chapter draws on intersectional feminist theory to examine a celebrity event from 2014-2016 that incited controversy across a variety of media platforms around issues of gender, sexuality, race, and class. I track each event across online and legacy media outlets and engage in multiplatform critical technocultural discourse analysis to analyze how discussions amongst issue publics that coalesce around each event both reflect and further define contemporary feminist discourses in ways that are often distinctly shaped by the digital platforms on which they emerge (Burgess & Matamoros-Fernández 2016, Brock 2016). In contrast to

prior feminist media studies research that argues popular culture is largely postfeminist, I demonstrate that feminism, amplified by the famous voices that espouse it and the broad reach of the digital spaces in which it appears, has increased its discursive power so greatly that many aspects of popular culture no longer take for granted the gains of the feminist movement but rather feminism itself. Further, the iteration of feminism that is ideologically dominant espouses the importance of intersectionality, calling out the limitations of white liberal feminism and foregrounding the importance of a feminist platform that interrogates racial, sexual, and class differences.

Overall, I argue that digital platforms have emerged as a major techno-cultural infrastructure for the dissemination and negotiation of the positions, goals, and actions of the contemporary feminist movement, which experienced a resurgence in the wake of the crisis of neoliberalism. While established media institutions continue to inform popular understandings of feminism, it is the recirculation, re-mediation, and conversations around print, film, and television media images and discourses on digital platforms that are driving the ongoing shifts in the feminist movement. More specifically, I contend that celebrity culture is a potent site at which the very category of "feminism" is being challenged in these digital spaces. Together, digital platforms and celebrity culture form a crucial discursive arena where postfeminist logics are unsettled, opening up the possibility of a more radical, intersectional, and activist popular feminism.

Introduction

"[Celebrities] are like repeaters. Repeaters are the towers that you see at the top of mountains that pick up signals from the valley and carry them over the mountains to a broader audience. And that's what celebrities do, if we're doing our job right. We're picking up the voices of people who *can't* be heard and broadcasting their story." –Jane Fonda

In October 2017, the United States was entering its ninth month of Donald Trump's presidency, and the country was experiencing a wave of protests and demonstrations. From the pussy-hat-wearing Women's Marchers to the polo-clad white nationalists at Charlottesville, both Trump's resisters and supporters were galvanized by his administration's overtly sexist, racist, and xenophobic discourses and policies. Then, on October 5, in the midst of this sociopolitical chaos, *New York Times* reporters Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey (2017) published an exposé of famed Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein's decades of sexual harassment and assault. While his predatory behavior had long been an open secret in Hollywood and amongst industry gossip hounds, the article painted a picture of systematic abuse and its cover-up on a wide and horrifying scale. This bombshell report was corroborated and expanded five days later when Ronan Farrow (2017) published yet another report detailing Weinstein's pattern of harassment and assault in *The New Yorker*. In both articles, women bravely recounted their fear, their intimidation, their confusion, and their feelings of powerlessness in gut-wrenching detail. These revelations about Weinstein piled atop a growing mountain of other serial sexual harassers in the media industries such as Bill Cosby, Roger Ailes, and Bill O'Reilly. While none of these men had yet faced legal retribution, most lost work and were publicly shamed. Still others had received no such consequences; one former reality television star, who has been accused of

sexual harassment by over a dozen women and was caught admitting to a proclivity for such

behavior on tape, had even ascended to the White House.

Compounded by the mounting frustration at the Trump administration and bolstered by

an overall uptick in social activism, the Weinstein allegations opened the floodgates, and a rush

of sexual harassment and assault survivors came forth. On October 15, actress Alyssa Milano

(2017) took to Twitter and posted an image that read, "Suggested by a friend: 'If all the women

who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too.' as a status, we might give people a

sense of the magnitude of the problem." With this tweet, Milano unwittingly co-opted a

movement that had begun with activist Tarana Burke, who started the campaign in 2006 on

MySpace as a way to promote empowerment and solidarity amongst women of color who had

experienced sexual abuse (Ohlheiser 2017). However, amplified by the Weinstein allegations

and bolstered by Milano's fame, the #MeToo movement exploded across social media platforms.

In just 24 hours, Facebook reported that there had been 12 million posts, comments, and

reactions to #MeToo (CBS/AP 2017). After a week, the hashtag had been used over 1.7 million

times on Twitter by users in 85 different countries (Jarvey 2017). Women (and some men) in

Hollywood and beyond shared their stories of harassment and abuse, and the final months of

2017 turned into an almost daily series of allegations and firings of men across media and other

industries. So loud and transformative was the movement that *Time* magazine's Person of the

Year was "The Silence Breakers" (Edwards 2017).

Image 1: Alyssa Milano's #MeToo tweet, 15 October 2017

While the flood of allegations may have begun in Hollywood and was initiated by famous women who had the platform to speak and be heard, the dynamics of gendered sexual domination that they revealed extended far beyond the entertainment industries. Women in a range of other sectors and industries expressed solidarity. Notably, the Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, an association of approximately 700,000 Latina farmworkers in the United States, published a letter in *Time* magazine in support of the women and men in Hollywood who had come forward with stories of sexual harassment and assault (Time staff 2017). A month and a half later on January 1, 2018, a coalition of over one thousand women in the entertainment industry signed an open letter published in the *New York Times* (Time's Up 2018). They thanked the women of the Alianza Nacional de Campesinas for their support, acknowledged their privilege, and pledged to work on behalf of women, particularly blue-collar women, who are often not in a position to challenge the harassment and inequality they experience. To that end, these media industry professionals started the Time's Up Legal Defense Fund to provide

financial support and access to legal counsel for women who have been subjected to sexist and misogynistic treatment. Further, they announced their intention to "black out" the Golden Globes award show later that month. By wearing only black, their goal was to acknowledge the severity of the experiences so many Hollywood women had gone public about, as well as to raise awareness and support for the legal defense fund. The Globes blackout was successful, with nearly every woman and man who walked the red carpet participating. In addition to this fashion statement, many celebrity women brought activists as their plus-ones, among them #MeToo founder Tarana Burke.

Image 2: The official Time's Up Instagram account posted this image of actresses and activists at the Golden Globes on 7 January 2018.

This explosion of frustration, righteous anger, and feminist activism may have seemed sudden and even surprising, especially with its roots within celebrity culture that is so often considered the vapid and innocuous realm of baby bump watches and 'who wore it best?' However, the interrelated phenomena of the Weinstein scandal, #MeToo, and Time's Up demonstrate the increasing prominence, significance, and global impact of three intersecting

platforms at this historical juncture: the sociopolitical platform of feminism, the platform given to celebrities by virtue of their fame, and the various digital platforms on which networked publics cohere and communicate. This project tells the story of digital platforms' role in the new visibilities of feminism during the early 21st century through the lens of celebrity culture. I argue that digital platforms have emerged as the most significant techno-cultural infrastructure for the dissemination and negotiation of the positions, goals, and actions of the contemporary feminist movement, which experienced a resurgence in the wake of the crisis of neoliberalism. While established media institutions continue to inform popular understandings of feminism, it is the recirculation, re-mediation, and conversations around print, film, and television media images and discourses on digital platforms that are driving the ongoing shifts in the feminist movement. More specifically, I contend that celebrity culture is a potent site at which the very category of "feminism" is being challenged in these digital spaces. Together, digital platforms and celebrity culture form a crucial discursive arena where postfeminist logics are unsettled, opening up the possibility of a more radical, intersectional, and activist popular feminism.

I argue that these intersecting phenomena mark a shift to "platform feminism." Platform feminism describes the ways in which the intersection of feminism and digital platforms at this historical juncture *afford* the possibility of more intersectional, complex, contested, and activist feminisms. These feminisms are shaped by the logics and affordances of digital platforms and often articulated in, through, and around popular and celebrity cultures. They are characterized by debate and contention in contrast to simplified and dichotomized narratives and representations of feminism that have dominated (and, to an extent, continue to dominate) in other mass media. The multiple meanings of "platform" mirror this increased complexity and provide an apt descriptor for the transformations of feminism that the dissertation shows.

The concept of "platform feminism" pushes back against and offers an alternative to other descriptors of this current moment of feminism, such as "popular feminism," "postfeminism," "marketplace feminism" (Zeisler 2016), the "traffic in feminism" (Portwood-Stacer 2017), and the "fourth wave" (Munro 2013). While each of these phrases may describe aspects of the current iteration of feminism, they have their drawbacks and are not as flexible as needed to contend with the complexity and contradictions that characterize early 21st century feminism. Indeed, the open-endedness of the term "platform" sets this conceptualization apart, as does its foregrounding of the importance of digital platforms for feminisms.

Ultimately the first four terms are problematic because, as I will discuss in more detail in the following pages, they all are more or less predicated on one assumption: that there is a better feminism that exists than that which is manifest in popular culture. It is important to acknowledge that not all articulations of feminism within popular culture are politically useful and be sensitive to the ways in which feminism is used as a marketing technique. However, as scholars we must be careful not to reify academic feminism as "real" feminism and other feminisms as poorly-rendered reflections of it, leading to repetitive and ultimately unproductive analyses that are trapped within this argument's teleological foundations. Further, the concept of a "fourth wave" problematically reproduces the "wave" metaphor, which emphasizes differences rather than continuities between iterations of feminism and dampens a sense of coalition between feminists of different generations. Thus, the concept of "platform feminism" that I develop through mapping the intersections of digital platforms, celebrity, and feminism provides an important theoretical intervention that works to disrupt both teleological analyses of popular feminism and simplistic modes of historicizing feminist generations.

So why is this shift to "platform feminism" happening now? What dynamics inform its negotiation? And why is it useful and important to examine sociopolitical platforms like feminism through the lenses of celebrity and digital culture? Before I expand upon my argument about these networked discussions and the ways they are remaking our understandings of feminism, I want to step back and situate them within their historical and ideological context.

The negotiations occurring across digital platforms around celebrity and feminism are happening at, and are deeply informed by, a historical moment in which three potent discourses – post-racial, postfeminist, and the triumph of capitalism – that have powerfully structured the American national imaginary since the late 1970s have been thrown into crisis in the last decade. Post-racial and postfeminist ideologies ignore and/or dispute the existence of racial and sexual hierarchies. They assert that racial and gender equality have, for the most part, been achieved, and differences of race or gender do not systematically affect people. By asserting that race no longer matters to the majority of Americans, post-racial ideologies "disconnect race from the power relations in which inequality and racial discourses are embedded" (Rodriquez 2006, p. 646). Racial difference thus becomes innocuous, and racism a thing of the past (Mukherjee 2016). Similarly, postfeminist ideologies assert that gender equality has been achieved in Western spaces, so feminism is no longer necessary. By pointing to hard-won gains of the women's movement, such as mainstream acceptance of women working outside the home, many people then repudiate the movement as outdated and passé (McRobbie 2009). Both of these ways of thinking serve to disavow structural inequalities and, by extension, collective action. If people of color and women are effectively equal to white people and men, there is no need for them to forge solidarities to fight against oppressive systems that no longer exist (Mukherjee 2011). These perspectives, then, replace mobilization on behalf of the group with individual striving.

7

Both of these discursive moves are embedded within a broader neo-liberal ideology that had declared the triumph of capitalism and famously, the "end of history" (Fukuyama 2006).

Neoliberalism is an ideological and economic model that privileges laissez faire strategies of deregulation and privatization. Neoliberalism experienced a resurgence in the West in the 1980s when conservative leaders like President Ronald Reagan in the US and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the UK pushed for more austere economic policies (Hall 2002). Among these policies were deregulation, privatization, and an emphasis on the all-powerful free market, which gave large corporations more latitude, increasing the concentration of capital and power amongst those who already possessed it. At the same time, conservative policymakers set about dismantling social safety nets as they placed a renewed emphasis on individual responsibility. Stemming even farther back in the United States' ideological foundations to the Protestant work ethic, neoliberal notions of individual responsibility intimately tie morality to individual success; good citizens are responsible for pulling themselves up by their bootstraps and improving their lives through hard work and fiscal austerity, and a failure to do so constitutes a moral failure. Racial or gender discrimination are not considered factors in economic disparities (e.g. Jones & Mukherjee 2010). If a person of color or a woman failed to achieve the success of, say, a white man, that was simply because they did not work as hard as that white man did. Thus, neoliberal ideologies encourage individual competition rather than collective action (McRobbie 2015).

However, as capitalist practices of rampant deregulation and privatization were thrown into crisis following the economic downturn in 2008, so too were neoliberal modes of thinking (Chakravartty & Silva 2012). In the years following the financial crisis, more cracks began to show within the myths of post-racism and postfeminism. In particular, the 2012 murder of

Trayvon Martin at the hands of racist, trigger-happy neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman set off a wave of protests and mobilization against violence directed toward people of color (Alvarez & Buckley 2013). More instances of brutality against Black people, especially by police, continued to occur and receive a great deal of media attention, while many of the perpetrators of these violent acts, including Zimmerman, were acquitted of their crimes. It became clear that, although a Black man may have been elected President of the United States, the country was by no means post-racial (e.g. Enck-Wanzer 2011, Cisneros 2015). In response, activists Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi rallied to create the #BlackLivesMatter campaign that spanned social media networks and sponsored in-person demonstrations ("Herstory" n.d.).

In addition to this racial violence, the U.S. also experienced an uptick in blatant misogyny. For example, within the realm of policy, there were renewed attacks on women's access to reproductive care across the United States. According to a recent report from reproductive rights watchdog, The Guttmacher Institute, fully one-third of state restrictions on abortion since Roe v. Wade in 1973 have been enacted between 2010-2017 (Nash et al. 2018). Further, social media platforms opened up new avenues for misogynistic harassment. A particularly potent and highly mediated example is the 2014 #Gamergate scandal. #Gamergate consisted of a loose coalition of (presumably) men who targeted women in the gaming industry in August 2014, including game developers Zoe Quinn and Brianna Wu and feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian (Wingfield 2014). These women received a barrage of online harassment, rape and death threats, and their personal information was made public. This incident made it clear that misogyny still deeply structures American culture and has found new modes of expression online (Massanari 2017; Gray, Buyukozturk, & Hill 2017).

And so, in response to these cracks in the façade of postfeminist notions that sexism and misogyny are relegated to the past, attitudes towards feminism began to shift. Rather than the stereotypes of bra-burning, man-hating lesbians, "new visibilities" of feminism began to emerge across the media landscape (Gill 2016). Writer, actress, and director Lena Dunham created the explicitly feminist *HBO* series, *Girls*. More and more celebrities began openly identifying as feminists, and some, such as Emma Watson, backed that talk up with activist campaigns like the UN's #HeForShe movement. Beyoncé, on the same stage that, only one year earlier had showcased Miley Cyrus's controversial, highly sexualized, and racist performance of "We Can't Stop," performed "***FLAWLESS" standing in front of a screen with the word "FEMINIST" emblazoned in huge, bold lettering. Within the span of a year, the question, "Are you a feminist?," which had become de rigueur in interviews with celebrity women, transformed from a genuine query into a formality; *of course* they were. And if they said they were not, they were subjected to a chorus of online outrage and asked again and again until they acquiesced.

However, this seeming embrace of feminism by mainstream popular culture raised the question: what type of feminism? As the case studies in the chapters that follow demonstrate, forms of feminism that center white, heterosexual, middle class women are now facing contestation and critique across the media ecosystem on a wide scale. Extending from the priorities of certain aspects of second and third wave feminisms, this focus on the importance of the intersectionality of gender, race, class, and sexuality, born out of the shifting sociopolitical dynamics of the last decade, has spurred contestations of feminist perspectives that privilege white heterosexual middle and upper class women. These critiques have emerged in many discursive spaces, and I do not argue that celebrity culture is the only one in which these contestations and negotiations are productively occurring. However, I claim that the nexus of

celebrity and digital culture is a particularly potent site for examining these dynamics for several key reasons. The last five years have demonstrated a huge uptick in the frequency and affirmativeness of discussions of feminism within celebrity culture. Once a mantle to be shunned, feminism is now frequently incorporated to celebrities' personal brands. At the same time, the lines between the worlds of celebrity and politics, which have been breaking down over the past several decades, have grown ever blurrier with Donald Trump's ascendance to the White House and his deployment of tabloid celebrity logics within the realms of political leadership and policy.[1]

Further, digital media platforms have transformed social activism across the world, including modes of feminist discussion and action. Together, the seismic sociocultural waves made by the dethroning of Harvey Weinstein, #MeToo, and Time's Up reveal how central the intersections of celebrity culture and social media have been, are, and will likely continue to be in public negotiations of sociopolitical debates, including those about feminism. This is not to say that the celebrity-driven "#MeToo era" goes unchallenged, nor that these shifts are deeply, permanently transformative, nor that, out of celebrity culture, an unproblematic feminist utopia is emerging. In many cases, quite the contrary is true. My goal is rather to trace how feminist discourses have circulated across media platforms and amongst networked publics in relation to celebrity culture, how those discourses pose a challenge not only to racism and misogyny but

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[1] Many scholars, namely P. David Marshall (1997), have analyzed how political leaders mobilize celebrity/cultural industry practices – such as a focus on personal, intimate, and individual qualities – for legitimation. Drawing on Weber's (1968) concepts of charisma and charismatic leadership, Marshall explored the convergence of political and celebrity power, a convergence that is especially manifest in Trump's presidency. Others outside of celebrity studies, namely in reality television studies, have also analyzed "the mutual modification of entertainment and politics," especially through the role of political satire on television (Hartley 2008, p. 9; Gray et al 2009).

also to white liberal feminism, and the process by which a different relationship between popular culture and feminism is being negotiated.

In order to explore the interconnection of these three types of platforms – celebrity, social media, and feminism – this project takes a case study approach, mapping and analyzing how popular feminism filters into and accumulates within online discourses around several celebrity incidents and how, through the amplifying power of both celebrity and social media, new understandings of feminism are negotiated. My conceptualization of the term "platform" draws from Tarleton Gillespie's (2010) seminal "The Politics of Platforms." In this piece, Gillespie defines the four "semantic territories" of the word "platform" and upon which the term as a descriptor for digital intermediaries depends. These are the computational (digital infrastructures like Twitter), the architectural (such as the Oscar stage), the figurative (a position, such as the elevated position of the celebrity), and the political (articulated beliefs like feminism). These four meanings allow me to open up the notion of "platform" and explore both the semantic and practical interplay between politics and platforms. The elastic meaning of the term offers implications for celebrity, feminism, and social media, and Gillespie's insights provide a structure that helps me to discuss these three types of platforms together in a logical and cohesive way.

For well over five decades now, media discourses have been central to our understanding of the feminist movement. Representations of feminism and feminists in music, on television, in film, and across news coverage have shaped and guided popular conceptions. But now, digital media platforms present interesting new questions and challenges as media texts, events, and figures spawn discussion and debate online, with greater speed and on a larger scale than was possible through legacy – primarily print and broadcast - media. To understand how digital

platforms are transforming the feminist movement, I begin with a brief history of the second and third "waves" of feminism, focusing primarily on the ways that popular media has shaped and been shaped by the feminist movement. Then, before moving on to discuss current dynamics of popular feminism and the role of digital platforms in this transformation, I situate this project within the field of platform studies. In particular, I focus on two key phenomena and the ways in which digital platforms afford such behavior: online harassment and digital activism. Finally, with this foundational literature on platforms in place, I discuss the "new visibilities" of feminism in the early 21st century in the context of work on digital feminism and celebrity feminism.

Feminism(s) and the Media

The second wave[2] of feminism lasted roughly from the early 1960s through the early 1980s. Whereas the first wave, which took place in the last 19th and early 20th centuries, focused primarily on women's suffrage, feminists of the second wave worked toward a broader range of legal and social reforms. Reinvigorated by the publication of Betty Friedan's (1963) seminal book, *The Feminist Mystique,* second wave feminist activists and academics sought to reform or totally dismantle patriarchal structures by, among many initiatives, expanding women's reproductive rights, agitating for workplace and wage equality, mobilizing against domestic violence, and fighting against sexist media representations. But, even as the mass media provided

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[2] Many feminist scholars have pointed out the problems with the "wave" metaphor, namely that it emphasizes the differences between generations of feminism rather than their continuities, flattens the complexity of different historical moments of feminism into homogenous monoliths, and promotes and teleological narrative of replacement in which each successive wave improves upon and replaces its predecessor (Hewitt 2010, Fernandes 2010, Crossley 2017). By using the term here I do not intend to reify these problems but use it for clarity as it is the most commonly used descriptor of feminist history. This project seeks, in part, to interrogate the media narratives that bolster these generational divides and deploys the terms "new visibilities" (Gill 2016) and "platform feminism" to describe the transformations taking place within feminism(s) in the 2010s rather than calling it a "fourth wave" to avoid perpetuating this inaccurate and problematic metaphor.

fodder for feminists to critique, many women first came into contact with feminist thought through its representations in the media. Because of this centrality, many scholars have focused on how the media framed and depicted feminism and feminists during the second wave, particularly in the news. Beck (1998) distills the conclusions of much feminist scholarship on such representations, arguing that, when the movement was not ignored, its members were portrayed as deviant, man-hating bra-burners. She also points out the media's tendency to essentialize complex and complicated feminisms into a homogenous monolith, often in a diluted, deradicalized form.

In her wide-ranging analysis of media portrayals of feminists and "empowered" women in the 1960s and 70s, Douglas (1995) presents similar findings. She demonstrates that feminists were mostly portrayed as silly or shrill, and portrayals of "new women" in shows like *Charlie's Angels* or *The Bionic Woman* served to limit and contain feminism. She also emphasizes that magazine and news portrayals of feminists legitimated "moderate" feminist goals like equal pay, child care, and access to abortions, but the "radical" feminists who sought to combat sexism in the home and in the media were framed as angry, ugly, man-hating lesbians. Further, the power of the "catfight" narrative was deployed to put the lie to feminist notions of sisterhood as the news media pitted women against one another. However, in her book, *Feminism in the News*, Kaitlynn Mendes (2011) presents a different conclusion. Through her analysis of representations of feminism and the feminist movement in four British and American newspapers from 1968-82, she finds that second wave feminism received more support and positive representation than previous research like Beck's has indicated; indeed, over half the articles in her sample were supportive. However, as Douglas and Sheridan, Margery, and Lilliburn (2006) have noted, the majority of affirmative media coverage was directed toward moderate, reformist feminist goals

that can be incorporated into a liberal individualist equal rights framework and do not radically challenge patriarchal power structures. As a result, certain aspects of moderate white liberal feminism gained traction while more radical feminist positions were mocked and demonized.

       This white liberal feminism that achieved limited mainstream acceptance also demonstrated a lack of diversity. As many women of color and LGBTQIA women pointed out, the reformist feminist work that grew out of Friedan's lily-white depiction of heterosexual women's ennui often marginalized or totally ignored the different experiences of women of color and queer women (e.g. Combahee River Collective 1982, Rich 1980). Such critiques of the lack of diversity within the feminist movement translated into an interest amongst many feminists in what Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) called "intersectionality," which describes "the various ways in which race and gender intersect in shaping structural and political aspects of violence against women of color" (p 1242). This focus on multiple axes of oppression, expanded to include class, sexuality, and ability, became a key focus of the third wave of feminism that began in the 1990s. In some ways a reaction to stereotypes of second wave feminists as uptight and judgmental of individual decisions deemed un-feminist, particularly around sex, the third wave sought to redefine what it meant to be a feminist by opening up the definition to allow for greater diversity and individual expression. Defined in various ways by women like Rebecca Walker (1992) and Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards (2000), third wave feminists worked to articulate a political stance born out of the understanding that culture is patriarchal and oppressive and identities are multifaceted and intersectional. Breaking free from that oppression and expressing one's identity was often achieved through individual choices that were empowering, from engaging in sexual promiscuity to embracing "girly" culture like fashion and makeup as a way to reclaim the importance of femininity.

However, this shift caused friction between second and third wave feminists, with many second wave feminists critiquing young women for taking for granted the gains they had fought for during the 1960s and 70s. To give a clearer picture of the third wave, which emerged in the 1990s, and its relationship to the second wave of the 60s and 70s, Astrid Henry (2004) explores feminist generational conflict in depth in *Not My Mother's Sister*. Here, Henry focuses on the "matrophor" that dominates depictions of feminism: the mother-daughter relationship that is the central trope when it comes to describing the dynamics between the second and third waves of feminism, reducing the plurality of potential relationships between feminists to one. This dyadic relationship, she argues, "appears to embolden feminism's 'daughters,' granting them authority and a generational location from which to speak" (p 3). In examining this trope of feminist generations, she explores processes of monolithic identification and disidentification: the presumed generational unity and shared identification among all feminists of a certain age, and the disidentification of third wave feminists who repudiate the feminism of their "mothers" in the second wave.

In order to understand more deeply the goals of these "daughters" of the second wave, Snyder (2008) brings together academic and popular literature to provide a description of third wave feminism, which she argues is "more than simply a rebellion against second-wave mothers" but rather works to provide a "tactical approach...to some of the impasses that developed within feminist theory in the 1980s" (p 175). Namely, she contends that the third wave is marked by three key tactical moves. The first is its foregrounding of personal narratives in order to illustrate an intersectional, multiperspectival feminism. The second is its embrace of multivolcality and action over synthesis and theoretical justification. Thirdly, in response to the divisiveness of the "sex wars" of second wave feminism, third wave feminism emphasizes

inclusivity and a nonjudgmental attitude, refusing "to police the boundaries of the feminist political" and "rid feminist practice of its perceived ideological rigidity" (p 175-6, 176). It is this final move in particular that moved many feminists to critique third wave feminism as politically inert and tantamount to postfeminism. In particular, some second wave feminists critiqued the third wave's focus on apolitical individual choice over collective action that designates any choice as feminist as long as it is freely chosen, without examining the (white supremacist patriarchal) cultural context that shapes those choices.

Notions of postfeminism were often articulated in and through popular culture, and so throughout the third wave, feminist media scholars took mainstream media to task for taking for granted certain reformist feminist ideas, like access to birth control and women's ability to enter the workplace, while repudiating notions of collective action and/or more radical feminist platforms in favor of neoliberal messages of individual striving. Angela McRobbie's *The Aftermath of Feminism* (2009) expresses the quintessential reading of postfeminist repudiation in popular media. She argues that the postfeminist discourses present in popular media texts relentlessly undermine the feminist gains of the 70s and 80s even as they seem to be engaging with feminism. In such media texts – she highlights, for example, *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* – feminism is both taken for granted and made to seem old and redundant as the mass media emphasizes that feminism as a social and political movement is passé; it has become common sense while simultaneously hated and repudiated. In the current neoliberal climate, women are expected to actively self-monitor and plan a life of their own while disembedded from any collective feminist community. Such arguments are echoed throughout feminist media studies and dominate critiques of popular culture during the late 1990s and 2000s. Notably, Rosalind Gill (2007, 2009) argues that the entanglement of pre-

17

feminist, feminist and anti-feminist ideas that make up postfeminist popular cultural texts (in this case, women's magazines) render gender ideologies more difficult to contest. In another take on the problems of postfeminism, Susan Douglas's *Enlightened Sexism* (2010) presents historical readings of the engagement between popular culture, gender, and feminism and introduces the concept of embedded feminism. While using different phrasing, her work similarly critiques popular culture's dismissal of feminist politics even though many ideas and policies stemming from feminism have become mainstream.

However, many feminist scholars have noted a "new visibility" of feminism in popular culture that diverges in some key ways from the third wave of the 90s and 00s as well as from postfeminism (Gill 2016). In contrast to the lifestyle, "choice" feminism so derided during the third wave, and in contrast to postfeminist repudiation of the label and the movement, the 2010s saw the emergence of a more vocal, explicitly feminist, and often quite active orientation towards feminism. In response, journalist Kira Cochrane (2013) announced the arrival of the fourth wave and its "rebel women." Some scholars, like Munro (2013) posit that the shifts currently ongoing within feminism may constitute a "fourth wave," and she links these shifts to the increasing importance of digital platforms. With its focus on intersectionality and the increasing prominence of the practice of "privilege-checking," this so-called "fourth wave," which I refer to as platform feminism, uses digital technologies to call out misogyny, sexism, and the still-"exclusionary nature of mainstream feminism" (p 25). Before we explore this shifting orientation toward feminism in more detail, and the ways it is articulated through both digital platforms and celebrity culture, we first need a theoretical basis for understanding digital platforms.

Making Sense of Digital Platforms

In the early days of the Internet, some hoped that digital spaces would provide a utopia free of inequalities, where subjectivities inflected by race, gender, sexuality, ability, and class could be fluid or altogether erased. However, these subjectivities and the inequalities that structure their relationships followed us online, manifesting in ways that are shaped by the affordances of digital technologies yet tied to offline forms of oppression (Nakamura 2013; Daniels 2013). Soon it became clear that, far from being neutral spaces, platforms are deeply political. Scholars began to take an interest in critically studying platforms in the mid-2000s, defining platforms as programmable "infrastructures that support the design and use of particular applications, be they computer hardware, operating systems, gaming devices, mobile devices or digital disc formats" (Gillespie 2010, p. 349). Eventually this usage extended to include online environments like Facebook that allow users to design and use third party applications. Crucial to platform studies is the notion of platforms' programmability, which allows users to go beyond the original programmers' vision (Montfort & Bogost 2009). This notion of programmability – possibility and agency within the constraints delimited by the platforms' designers and channeled into profit by their creators – spawned great critical interest in the sociopolitical implications of the participatory media practices that occur on commercial platforms.

While many scholars including Jenkins (2006), Benkler (2006), and Deuze (2008) have explored how media convergence and practices of digital remixing blur the boundaries between producer and consumer that marked traditional media, this project is most indebted to scholarship that explores the ways in which platforms shape sociality through their affordances, including the ways that racial and gender differences shape that sociality (e.g. Brock 2012, Massanari 2017). Affordances are "functional and relational aspects which frame, while not

determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object" (Hutchby 2001, p. 444). In other words, affordances refer to the features and design of a platform that frame how users interact with that platform, limiting the possibilities of use and encouraging certain modes of interaction while not determining them. Key to thinking about how the affordances of platforms shape social interactions is José Van Dijck's (2013) concepts of "platformed sociality" and the online ecosystem. Van Dijck emphasizes that platforms and social practices are mutually constitutive. Social media platforms are integrated into social life, and programmers constantly tweak platforms to meet user needs and wants, building different niches or microsystems of sociality within the online ecosystem. Further, she emphasizes that platforms and the sociality occurs within them are not isolated from one another but are interdependent, forming a co-constitutive online ecosystem where a change in one platform can have reverberating effects across the system.

As a result of this interconnected ecosystem and the ways in which platforms and sociality are increasingly intertwined, Van Dijck (2016) has gone on to argue that we are living in a "platform society." Digital platforms and their computational logics now infiltrate nearly every facet of our social, economic, and interpersonal lives and have a great impact on public values. In further describing this infiltration, Plantin et. al. (2016) argue that, as platforms are becoming crucial to our everyday lives, we can think of them as infrastructural. However, despite these platforms' integral, infrastructural roles in many people's lives, they are not held to the same standards and regulations as other institutions and often do not take responsibility for anchoring public values. To deny such responsibility, spokespeople for platforms like Google and Twitter often rely on the rhetoric of neutrality, discursively constructing these sites as blank slates on which users disseminate information and ignoring how features of the platform afford

certain behaviors while discouraging others (Gillespie 2010). However, as Van Dijck has pointed out, although these platforms enable actions outside of the designers' original plans, they are programmed to afford and encourage certain forms of sociality while limiting and constraining others. Thus, the algorithms and features that make up the platform are not neutral at all but rather have deep sociopolitical implications. Two broad categories of sociality that occur on and are shaped by social media platforms and are particularly relevant to this project are online harassment and digital activism.

Online Harassment

Many scholars have explored dynamics of identity and identity-based harassment online, paying special attention to the ways in which interface design, affordances such as anonymity or pseudonymity, and content moderation policies enable toxicity. For example, Massanari (2017) examines the ways Reddit's unique design choices afford a degree of lawlessness that can breed hate, misogyny, and practices that alienate users who are "outsiders," i.e. not young, white, cis, heterosexual men. Ultimately she argues that Reddit's design and assumptions of use afford and even encourage what she calls "toxic technocultures. Other scholars, such as Matamoros-Fernandez (2017), have looked beyond the confines of a single platform to look at how the combination of users' practices, the platforms' features and algorithms, and editorial practices enable "platformed racism" across the online ecosystem. However, issues of identity-based harassment have long preceded modern incidents like #Gamergate or instances of platformed racism. Issues of harassment and questions about the most appropriate ways to combat it without impinging upon the core ideals of free speech and openness have existed since the early days of online sociality, and concern about how to deal racialized and gendered hatred and violence

21

online has also long been a source of conflict (Levy 2010). For example, Dibbell (1994) recounts a "virtual rape" that occurred on LambdaMOO, an online roleplaying space. In response to this assault, after a great deal of contentious deliberation, the community ultimately removed the offending player. Another early example are the battles that occurred over moderation on Usenet, an online discussion board. As the boards grew throughout the 1980s and 1990s, tensions emerged between factions who wanted to regulate content and those who wanted to maintain total freedom of speech (Pfaffenberger 1996). Moderators found that the latter policy resulted in flame wars and spam that rendered the platform unusable and settled upon a middle ground that restricts content that undermines the platform's ability to function as an effective discussion system. Today most platforms also try to settle on a middle ground that balances moderation with freedom. This balance often comes in the form of terms of use, sometimes enforced by moderators. However, this solution is problematic, in part because this emotionally taxing labor often falls to members of the community who are not compensated (e.g. Terranova 2000).

As online communities have grown larger and more diverse since the days of platforms like Usenet and LambdaMOO, so too have issues of (often gendered and racialized) harassment. To describe a variety of online harassment behaviors ranging from trolling to cyberbullying to racist, homophobic, and/or misogynistic acts, Emma Jane (2014) uses the term "e-bile." Such a broad concept allows us to draw analytical connections between a wide range of behaviors, understanding a specific incident as just one example from a much larger and diverse set of related attacks that occur across platforms. Understanding this "e-bile" - how it arises and how we might better understand and combat it - is a vibrant area of inquiry within digital studies. Yet while it is important to understand how technologies shape and facilitate e-bile and toxic technocultures, it is crucial to remember that such technologies are embedded within social

relations that are toxic on and offline and informed by broader sociocultural dynamics. In their analyses of "cyber racism" and "networked misogyny," Daniels (2009) and Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2016) explore how the affordances of various platforms, such as anonymity or pseudonymity and the resultant disinhibition, can contribute to violently racist and misogynistic behaviors. However, they emphasize that both white supremacy and sexism deeply structure Western cultures. Overall, the logics that are used to program and to govern digital platforms often leave open spaces for online harassment and violence.

Digital Activism, Digital Feminisms

As inequalities and racist, misogynistic harassment have surfaced in digital spaces, so too have social justice movements. However, the migration of social movements online spawned debates amongst scholars. Is online activism "real" activism, in which activists engage in activities with obvious material implications, or is it merely "slacktivism," which is often treated as inferior? In his early, pre-social media analysis of online activism, Sandor Vegh (2003) provided a set of three dimensions of online activism: awareness/advocacy, organization/mobilization, and action/reaction. Vegh envisioned these categories as building off of one another; the increased visibility afforded by the reach of the internet could lead social movements to deliberate and organize themselves into action. However, much of the conversation around online activism critiques it for failing to ever move beyond the first category of awareness and visibility, denigrating it as "slacktivism." Rotman et al. (2011) define slacktivism as a "low-risk, low-cost activity via social media, whose purpose is to raise awareness, produce change, or grant satisfaction to the person engaged in the activity" (p. 821). Often, as scholars such as Morozov (2009) argue, slacktivism presumes that increased visibility

is tantamount to producing change, operating under the assumption that problems can be solved by awareness alone.

Some scholars who have studied online social movements, including activism oriented around awareness hashtags that occurs on Twitter, have worked to demonstrate the fallacy that awareness alone is sufficient to address systemic injustices. For example, in their analysis of the #BringBackOurGirls hashtag, Chiluwa and Ifukor (2015) raise the possibility that the campaign has only resulted in "emotional ideological evaluations of social actors and situations," which "may achieve practically nothing, leaving the main problems of insecurity unsolved. In other words, they may end up as mere slacktivism" (p. 3). Ultimately they argue that social media campaigns may be productive if they are followed by practical offline actions, but the increased awareness of the campaign alone is not productive. However, other scholars such as Gleason (2013) argue that visibility due to online activism can be immensely productive and lead to action. His research on the #OccupyWallStreet movement indicates that individuals can utilize Twitter discussions of the movement to learn about it informally. Gleason argues that the brevity of tweets and the curational affordance of the hashtag allow users to quickly view and learn from multiple perspectives on topics like social movements. Such informal learning, with its low barrier to entry, may move users to become more politically and socially active.

Bonilla and Rosa (2015) echo this conclusion and go on to point out that social media activism affords possibilities that "real" activism does not. Instead of denigrating online activism as inferior to "real" activism, they emphasize that social media can function as a site through which racial and sexual minorities can foreground their struggles in ways they may be unable to do so in an embodied context. Speaking specifically in the context of the #Ferguson campaign in light of Michael Brown's death, they show how Twitter can function as a discursive space for

users to voice their opinions in a highly visible way. Further, they explain that the persistence of

Twitter affords aggregation, which can be powerful. Treem and Leonardi (2012) explain that

persistence, in which information remains in the same form after its original display, means that

it can function to sustain knowledge over time (p. 155). In light of this persistence and its

potential to generate communities of knowledge (Treem and Leonardi 2012, p. 158), Bonilla and

Rosa (2015) contend that, while Twitter activism might be fleeting, it is aggregative. Each

subsequent instance of activism on the platform does not occur in a vacuum but rather in the

context of campaigns that came before it. In this way, not only does Twitter provide a space for

disenfranchised "Others" to speak out about their experiences, it can also defragment those

experiences in some ways through its persistence. The "piling up" of various Twitter activist

movements has shaped many users' technological frame, or view of the technology's purpose, of

Twitter as a site of activism, and the persistence of these multiple movements can thus provide

users with a broader understanding of the social contexts and conversations in which each

individual movement is located (Treem et al., 2015).

It is within these contexts of online harassment and social media activism that digital

platforms are, in many ways, providing space for activists to reshape the feminist movement and

contest postfeminist logics. Activists use social media to engage in various forms of activism,

including calling for boycotts of products with sexist advertisements (Clark 2014), engaging in

awareness campaigns against sex trafficking (Chiluwa & Ifukor 2015), agitating for bodily and

sexual autonomy (Rúdólfsdóttir & Johánnsdóttir 2018), and calling out and pushing back against

racist and sexist ideas and behaviors (Nakamura 2015, Petray & Collin 2017, Jane 2017). As do

the case studies that make up this project, these examples vary widely in the level and type of

action they call for, the explicitness of their alignment with movements for racial or gender

25

equality, and their efficacy in generating change. But all demonstrate the fallacy of post-racial and/or postfeminist ideologies and work to shape digital platforms as a space of activism, where a polyphony of voices can be amplified and, in some cases, translate into change.

Further, as digital platforms infiltrate nearly every facet of our lives and are, for many, a near-constant presence, the line between online and offline feminist activism is increasingly blurry. As Jackson (2018) found through interviews with young feminists, while their experiences of digital feminism are predictably different as feminism is not a monolith, digital media use is an integrated part of these young women's feminist practice, and they demonstrate a continuity with their online and offline feminist information sharing, education, critique, and protest. She argues, then, that "digital media production enables" a form of feminist agency (p 46). Similarly, Lane (2017) posits that digital platforms provide a space for the generation of a feminist rhetoric, providing a platform for women's voices that are often silenced in offline contexts. Baer (2016) perhaps most forcefully asserts the power of digital feminisms, arguing that they are "*redoing* feminism for a neoliberal age" (p. 19, emphasis in original). She argues that "by working through, making visible, and re-signifying central tensions in contemporary feminism, as well as the precarity of feminism itself in neoliberalism," digital feminisms "have begun to re-establish the grounds for a collective feminist politics beyond the realm of the self-styled individual" by engaging in feminism as a process of finding new political ways forward outside of personalized, lifestyle feminism (p. 19). The ways in which the agency afforded by digital platforms is shaping the current directions feminism and opening spaces for collective feminism, then, is the key focus of this project.

However, even as digital platforms are enabling different forms of activism and lending that activism greater amplification, many of the problems that have plagued feminism for

decades have also migrated online. In particular, the feminist movement's history of white

supremacy and marginalization of women of color has surfaced within digital feminisms.

Through three case studies of White feminist digital activism (Lean In, One Billion Rising, and

#FemFuture), Daniels (2015) argues that such movements demonstrate how white women come

to stand in for "all" women, erase and colonize the experiences of women of color, and ignore

the importance of race in the political economy. More in-depth studies of the backlash against

#FemFuture, a report about the future of digital feminism spearheaded by two white feminists,

similarly demonstrate how digital feminism can reproduce the failings of previous waves of

feminism by excluding women of color and even labeling them "toxic" when they call out their

marginalization (Loza 2014; Risam 2015). Even as digital platforms open new spaces for

feminist activism and afford new modes of mobilization, feminism remains a contested

movement in which activists must continue to agitate for the importance of de-centering

whiteness.

Celebrities and Feminism

In addition to the transformational potential of digital platforms for the feminist

movement, celebrity culture has also emerged in the last decade as a surprisingly vibrant and

contentious discursive arena in which feminism is negotiated, often on and through digital

platforms. While celebrities have been involved in activism and the feminist movement for

decades, they have become increasingly involved and prominent over the past two decades.

Indeed, up until the last few years, most of the scholarship that has focused on the intersections

of celebrity and feminism has focused on women who achieve fame through their feminist

activism rather than celebrities who are famous for other reasons and then become involved in

feminism. But theorists of popular media have long been interested in the discursive and political power that celebrities can wield. P. David Marshall (1997) lays the groundwork for understanding celebrities' power in public discourse and how that discursive power can translate into social and political power. Central to this power is the tension between individuality and collectivity, tensions that are thrown into even greater relief when the celebrity gains the authority to speak on behalf of social movements like feminism. By virtue of the attention the public pays to them, celebrities have greater agency than most people and "are allowed to express themselves quite individually and idiosyncratically while the rest of the members of the population are constructed as demographic aggregates" (p xlvii). This heightened individuality and attention gives them discursive power by granting their voices to be "legitimately significant" (p xlviii). This legitimation allows the celebrity to gain power by embodying "'collective configurations' of the social world" (p xlix). Overall, their celebrity platform grants them discursive power to embody and speak to and for collectives. However, as chapters two and three will demonstrate, this power as it relates to celebrities who speak to and for feminism can spur outrage if certain members of the collective disagree with the feminism this celebrity embodies and speaks.

One of the earliest scholars to think through the implications of this celebrity power on feminist movements was Jennifer Wicke (1994) in her article, "Celebrity Material: Materialist Feminism and the Culture of Celebrity." She argues that "celebrity zone" of famous feminists, the discursive, public space where feminism is "in most active cultural play" should not be dismissed by feminist critics as inauthentic (p 757). Just as Hollows and Moseley (2006) caution about popular feminism more generally, she argues that "materialist feminism cannot afford to reject celebrity culture and its practices out of hand in defense of an (illusory) authentic or totally

uncontaminated intellectual theorizing" (p 772). Instead of setting up the celebrity zone as a foil

for a "real" feminism that is outside of the popular, she calls for scholars to take it seriously as a

space that is potentially productive (as well as unproductive) for feminist theorization and work.

To do so means to interrogate how that celebrity zone contains and shapes individuals whose

selves become "a profound translation of feminism" for the public, embodying its collective

configuration (p 761).

To describe the individuals who occupy the celebrity zone and work to translate the

collective feminist movement to the public, Taylor (2014) uses the term "celebrity feminist" to

denote those whose fame comes as "the *direct product* of their feminist intervention into public

discourse" (p 75). These celebrity feminists work "to mediate what comes to constitute feminism

in the popular imaginary" (2017, p 25). Celebrity feminists have long caused anxiety as their

platform allowed them, as far as much of the media was concerned, to speak for a heterogeneous

collective of feminists in what, radical feminists claimed, was a version of feminism very much

in line with the establishment. While Taylor acknowledges the validity of such concerns, she

seeks to complicate them by pointing out the important work celebrity feminists do in keeping

feminism visible and a part of public debate and active in the construction of feminism.

Part of the anxiety amongst critics of celebrity feminists has to do with a broader concern of the

media's engagement with feminism, particularly because popular feminism gains traction in

mainstream media because of its commercial viability, its lack of radicalism and, often, rigor.

However, drawing on Wicke, she emphasizes that there is no singular feminism that one can do

or speak, therefore judging particular elevated women on the grounds that they fail to effectively

'represent' feminism is complicated by both the problem of representation more broadly, as well

as the impossibility of there being a unified, fixed form of feminism" (p 33). However, as Beck

(1994) and Douglas (1995) have shown, and as chapters two and three demonstrate, the tendency of media to craft simplified narratives that render feminism as a monolith and pit women against each other problematizes this argument. While Taylor's claim may apply to feminist scholars seeking to understand celebrity feminism, media narratives do often assert one right way of doing feminism and being feminist, undermining the nuance she desires.

Extending this literature on celebrity feminists, the work of entertainment celebrities to provide some cultural legitimation for feminism has received more scholarly attention over the last several years, and much of that attention has centered on suspicion and critique (Hamad & Taylor 2016). Indeed, much of the literature can be summed up by Roxane Gay's (2014) oft-cited piece from *The Guardian* titled, "Jennifer Lawrence? Emma Watson? These aren't the feminists you're looking for." In this piece, Gay asserts that celebrity feminism is "a gateway to feminism, not the movement itself" and raises concerns about celebrities' use of feminism as a marketing ploy. Her critiques reflect larger suspicions of popular feminism and celebrity feminism in particular as overly individualized, capitalistic, and politically inert, and other scholars echo these worries. Some have focused on individual celebrities. For example, in her analysis of Lena Dunham, Murray (2017) argues that her fractured persona as celebrity and feminist, as well as the inconsistency of her positions on certain feminist issues, undermines her credibility. Concerns about credibility, authenticity, and consistency – is celebrity feminism "real" feminism or a messy dilution lacking in sociopolitical heft? – similarly mark several studies of male celebrity feminists, which critique them as co-opting feminism to further their careers or, at the very least, exemplifying postfeminist logics as their acceptance of feminism is taken as a sign of its success (Feasey 2017, Cobb 2016).

However, other studies of feminist celebrities offer more complex conclusions, positioning celebrities' engagement with feminism as a space of negotiation. For example, Weidhase (2015) draws out the tensions between black and white feminism in Beyoncé's 2014 MTV VMA performance and Annie Lennox's subsequent denouncement of her use of the word "feminist" as "feminism lite" and "tokenism." Ultimately Weidhase argues that we should take Beyoncé's feminism seriously as an example of "hip-hop feminism" that works to claim and theorize feminism outside of the walls of academia (Durham et al 2013). Weidhase was not the only scholar intrigued by Beyoncé's expression of feminism. Keller and Ringrose (2016) conducted an ethnographic study of young women's readings of her feminist persona. The young women critique celebrities for co-opting feminism because it is suddenly fashionable and question the contradictions inherent in celebrities like Beyoncé proclaiming their feminist allegiance while apparently bowing to patriarchal norms of female sexuality. Further, they find it troubling that many people do not know about feminism from other sources and are learning about it through celebrities. Ultimately, Keller and Ringrose find that the girls are using celebrity feminism to construct their own debates and understandings of feminism. Tennent and Jackson (2017) also explore audience engagement with celebrity feminism in their analysis of blogs and comments. Their analysis shows two key dynamics. First, bloggers and commenters demonstrate a frustration with celebrity feminism, framing it as "bad" while assuming a more authentic, politically active feminism outside of the popular. However, they also find voices that point out that celebrities experience similar pressures in a postfeminist world as all women, calling for empathy. Overall, these studies work to break out of the good/bad binary and take seriously the new visibilities of feminism within celebrity culture. This dissertation joins that conversation, remaining attentive to the problems associated with popular feminism – namely, the relationship

31

between celebrity culture and capitalism – while examining their negotiation on and through digital platforms.

New Visibilities and Platform Feminism

Moving away from this binary logic and the intellectual bind it places on analyses of popular feminism is of crucial importance to this project's examination of digitally-mediated and celebrity-driven feminism. Andi Zeisler (2016a) goes in-depth about the particulars of this new, digitally-focused brand of feminism, by exploring how new media are providing new outlets for feminist media and, in turn, shaping and reshaping the movement. She explains that "the contemporary feminism that is centered in new media" is linked to past iterations, particularly the second wave in its focus on consciousness raising, demonstrating that the personal is political, and in its inclusive community-mindedness.

However, the affordances of digital technologies also render this new iteration different due to the possibility of connection across geographic and conceptual divides, as well as increased access and lower barriers to entry than other forms of feminist activism and debate (although Zeisler acknowledges that access to such technologies is still differential across socioeconomic, racial, and other divides). The intersectionality and "resistance to the urge to universalize and speak for others" that characterizes this new platform feminism can be seen as more wide-ranging than ever, it also means that feminism is increasingly fragmented. While she cautions against overstating the democratic potential for new media and points out that we risk creating an exclusionary canon of prominent digital feminists just as we have created exclusionary feminist icons in other iterations of feminism, she praises digital media for its potential to speak back to mainstream media.

32

Zeisler (2016b) does emphasize the limits of this "new" feminism in her book, *We Were Feminists Once*. In this analysis of popular feminism, Zeisler aims to understand what she terms "marketplace feminism." She argues that the new visibilities of feminism in popular culture, specifically its rise since 2014, can be described as "marketplace feminism," a media-friendly, highly marketable version of feminism that is based primarily on individual choice and identity rather than collective action. In many ways a continuation of postfeminist analyses of popular culture, Zeisler's work takes to task the depoliticized, decontextualized, simplified feminism that is generating a great deal of cultural (and actual) capital across industries, from fashion and beauty to celebrity culture to television and film. However, as Zeisler points out, despite gains in the visibility and affirmation of feminism, women's rights are still under siege, as much if not more than they were before this renewed visibility. Overall, Zeisler argues that mainstream acceptance of the term is not the end goal of feminism but rather that acceptance must become "a useful tool for activism" (p. 257). In many ways this argument echoes Gay's (2014) position that celebrity feminism is a gateway to feminism, or Banet-Weiser's argument that popular feminism should not be set up in contrast to "real" feminism but rather that it offers a space for a "deeper probe" into feminist issues.

This tension between acknowledging the potential of popular feminism through the possibilities that digital platforms provide and the amplification afforded by celebrities while making sense of its limitations in a nuanced and productive way is a consistent theme in scholarship about the new visibilities of feminism and one this project interrogates and extends. Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer (2017) grapple with these tensions by theorizing popular feminism in the late 2010s as exemplifying not "marketplace feminism" as Zeisler calls it but rather the "traffic in feminism." Whereas Zeisler's conceptualization of marketplace feminism

effectively reproduces postfeminist arguments, Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer argue that the traffic in feminism is slightly different in that it explicitly recognizes that inequality exists but fails to reckon with or work to disrupt the "political economic conditions that allow that inequality to be profitable" (p 886). They go on to argue that "the traffic in feminism is therefore decidedly not postfeminist" because it recognizes the need for some version of feminism, but the version that gains mainstream traction is primarily a white, cisgender capitalistic version of feminism (p 886). In this way, while the traffic in feminism is not postfeminist, it "has a similar effect to postfeminism" (p 886). In other words, while we might be taking a different route to get there in the 2010s than in the past two decades, all roads through the popular lead back to postfeminist conclusions – a reformist version of white liberal feminism that is marketable but ultimately serves to contain radical critique of the systemic roots of white supremacist patriarchal capitalism.

Along the same lines, Gill (2016) asserts that feminist media scholars still need the insights of postfeminism, as the renewed popularity of feminism in the 2010s is not totalizing but rather co-exists with anti-feminist and postfeminist ideologies. She reminds us not to be too enchanted with the new visibilities of feminism but to explore them within the complex and murky context of multiple and conflicting popular attitudes toward feminism. While my analyses remain attentive to the ways many postfeminist critiques still apply to much of popular culture, I argue that feminist media scholars should radically interrogate the binary logic that underlies the postfeminist argument rather than taking it for granted. In some ways, postfeminism is predicated on the notion that feminism may not be dead within popular culture but exists as what Munford, Waters, and Whelehan (2014) refer to as "ghost feminism," a spectral form of a "more legitimate" feminism that haunts its popular counterparts (p xiii). We need to find ways of

interrogating the limitations of platform feminism while acknowledging that, although academic and activist feminist circles have crucial insights that may not always achieve dominance within mainstream media depictions of feminism, that there is no "feminism" that exists fully outside of or apart from the popular. As Hollows and Moseley (2006) argue, second and third wave feminism developed alongside and within popular culture, and this co-development continues now. It is crucial to think of feminism as a multifaceted, complicated, and diverse movement that shifts and changes, finding different forms of expression in different discursive spaces, including the academy, political activism, Twitter, and celebrity culture.

This project, then, aims neither to outline the ways in which platform feminism fails to achieve the nuances of academic feminism, nor to praise these new visibilities of feminism as perfect iterations of the movement. Rather, I work to understand how different notions of feminism constantly circulate around celebrity culture, facilitated and shaped by the affordances of digital platforms. My analysis is based on the argument that it is not sufficient to analyze or evaluate celebrities and their expressions of feminism in isolation because, especially at this historical juncture, the media commentary around celebrity feminists is diverse, contentious and fascinating. As Brady (2016) points out, part of what is at stake in the discourse around celebrity feminists "are determinations of what counts as feminist action, and who gets to adjudicate on its political veracity" (4). Further, she emphasizes that social media is a crucial site at which this jockeying and debate over feminist authenticity takes place. Due to the affordances of digital media, to encounter news of and commentary on feminist celebrities and/or debates "is to always encounter a debate over…feminism" (10). She ends by concluding that the goal should not to be to pin down or define feminism by saying who is and who is not authentic in their politics; rather, the beauty of the diversity of celebrity definitions of feminism and the resultant debates

highlight that "the production of a field of feminism politics…cannot be definitively resolved" (11). And, as Hobson (2016) argues in response to Gay's (2014) article, "celebrity feminist discourses occur in sustained dialogue with other feminist discourses, which further complicates the meanings of and possibilities for a celebrity feminism that might coexist alongside grassroots feminism, academic feminism, and other spheres of influence." While she acknowledges that celebrity feminism "continues to assert privilege and prestige" over other forms of feminism because of the platform afforded to celebrities, she emphasizes that it exists in dialogue with multiple feminisms, particularly in online spaces where audiences (who are often feminists) interact with and speak back to celebrity feminism. For this reason, she argues that it is "more than the gateway to the movement" that Gay suggests, but rather is a part of the movement.

Filtering, Accumulating, and Amplifying Feminisms

In keeping with these insights, this project pushes back against the idea that there is a "real" feminism separable from and thus outside of popular culture. Instead of evaluating how well celebrity feminism reflects "real" feminism, through the case studies that follow I theorize the processes by which feminism and celebrity culture are transforming one another and how those processes are digitally mediated. I conceptualize feminism and celebrity culture as ideological and discursive spaces with semi-permeable and intersecting boundaries. As networked publics discuss various incidents in celebrity culture that relate to issues of gender, sexuality, race, and class, they engage in boundary work around feminism, negotiating its definitions and its platforms. I argue that this negotiation relies on three inter-linked media protocols: filtration, accumulation, and amplification.

Because the boundaries around feminism and celebrity culture are semi-permeable and intersecting, these two categories are not immutable but change and develop based on their contexts, shifting and incorporating new ideas, positions, and actions as the sociocultural environment around them changes. Further, they overlap, and increasingly so, as at this particular moment celebrities frequently engage with feminist ideas and celebrity culture provides fodder for negotiations of feminism amongst networked publics. Such change – both to the makeup of what constitutes feminism and celebrity culture, as well as to the overlap between them – happens as certain ideas, positions, actions, etc. from the broader social, political, economic, and technological environments **filter** through the boundary and become incorporated into them. At the same time, changes in these environments also mean that certain ideas, positions, actions, etc. filter out of dominant conceptions of feminism and of celebrity culture, and in the overlap between them, which is the subject of this project. Many scholars have argued, and rightly so, that the aspects of feminism that most easily filter through the boundary of celebrity or other spaces of popular culture are those which do not significantly threaten the foundations of those spaces; namely, capitalism. What feminist ideas, positions, actions, and beliefs could filter into celebrity culture were those which were marketable, and that marketability is reliant on capitalism remaining in tact. However, my analyses show that, as capitalism has been thrown into crisis and the broader sociopolitical environment in the West is increasingly unstable, that destabilization is having a ripple effect even within the realm of celebrity culture and what feminisms are marketable. In other words, this destabilization is remaking the boundary of the intersection of celebrity and feminism, and thus what can filter into and become amplified within that space is shifting. In the chapters to come, I will explore this process on a granular level, mapping how it happens and tracing consistencies and dissimilarities

in the aspects of feminism that filter across platforms and become amplified within and through celebrity culture.

As I will demonstrate, this filtration increasingly occurs on digital platforms, which also have (or, often lack) their own processes of filtration. Filtration at the platform level functions in two key ways: a failure to filter out toxic content, which leaves it present to infiltrate spaces like celebrity culture; and curation, which sorts and filters what content merits attention. First, many social media platforms like Reddit or Twitter are hesitant to engage in the systematic moderation of content in order to promote the notions of "free speech" and openness and to avoid accusations of censorship. This means that many of these platforms lack robust and reliable recourses to challenge toxic and/or harassing content and behaviors, particularly on a wide scale. This lack of filtering out toxic content means that it remains in the broader discursive environment and, as we will see in subsequent chapters, can sometimes infiltrate into feminist spaces and celebrity culture. Additionally, filtration through curation can occur algorithmically, such as through trending topics, and through the recirculation of certain material, such as retweeting or embedding content elsewhere. And just as celebrity culture relies on the logics of capitalism, so too do the key logics behind such curation. By showing users what they think they will like, human and non-human actors thus work to increase engagement and time spent on social media platforms. I will explore the complexities of these multi-layered filtration systems in much more detail in the case studies.

As ideas, positions, actions, etc. discursively filter into and out of negotiations of feminism when networked publics discuss and debate celebrity events, certain ideas, positions, actions, etc. that stay **accumulate**. Accumulation helps to explain how "dominant conceptions" become dominant, and why a case study approach can be a useful way to analyze these

relationships. Some critiques of social media activism are that it is so reactive, fleeting, and ultimately results in little action. Some incident will occur, networked publics will mobilize in response, and then the controversy soon dies down. As Bonilla and Rosa (2015), the persistence of multiple online activist movements can provide users with a broader understanding of the social contexts and conversations in which each individual movement is located. This means that each individual occurrence does not happen in a vacuum but rather within the context of other responses and campaigns that have accumulated on the platform. This accumulation helps to shape usage of the platform at the same time that it helps to shape broader movements, like feminism, of which these campaigns are a part.

Further, it is important to note that the filtration and accumulation processes are two-way; not only do the broader sociocultural, political, and technological environments impact the nexus of celebrity and feminism, but the contents of that nexus also impact the broader environments of which it is a part. Increasingly, intersectional feminist discourses are filtering into and accumulating within dominant discourses. Facilitated by the frequency with which celebrity culture is discussed within mainstream media, and the ways in which intersectional feminism is filtering and accumulating within celebrity culture, the case studies in my dissertation demonstrate that some aspects of intersectional feminism are becoming commonsense across many media platforms.

Another key dynamic at work in this negotiation process is amplification. These case studies demonstrate that celebrity culture does not reveal phenomena or dynamics that exist solely within the world of celebrity. Rather, the attention and newsworthiness afforded to celebrities by virtue of their fame **amplify** phenomena and dynamics that are embedded within broader structures of power that non-celebrity women also experience. Image-based sexual

abuse, objectification, wage inequality, and/or online harassment impact or have impacted a majority of women. Celebrity incidents amplify these issues, propelling them into the spotlight while various media platforms, and particularly social media platforms, provide spaces for publics to discuss them.

Further, the circulation and recirculation of certain texts, framings, reactions, etc. to these celebrity incidents through digital platforms also serve to amplify and make dominant particular takes on each event. The various affordances of digital platforms amplify certain voices, certain texts, certain takes and understandings of the incidents I discuss. That amplification, which goes hand in hand with the process of filtration through curation, typically happens through recirculation. Retweeting amplifies. Embedding tweets in articles amplifies. Hyperlinking to or embedding other texts - like other articles, videos, studies, etc. - amplifies. At the same time, based on engagement, algorithms will amplify that which is popular and/or what they think users will like. So overall, amplification on digital media platforms often functions to keep that which is already dominant and popular dominant and popular.

Research design

My research design combines a qualitative interpretation of Burgess and Matamoros-Fernández's (2016) approach to "multiplatform issue mapping" with techniques with insights from Brock's (2016) "critical technocultural discourse analysis." In bringing together these two sets of methods and techniques, I track each celebrity incident across platforms by mapping and analyzing media objects associated with it. I draw on intersectional feminist theory and engage in a critical discourse analysis of each corpus of media objects, focusing not only on the content

itself but the ways in which that content is informed by the technical and cultural affordances of the digital platform on which it appears.

Drawing from Burgess and Matamoros-Fernandez's multiplatform mapping techniques, I orient my analysis around the notion of "issue publics," the "emergent sociopolitical assemblages with shared or interlocking concerns who know themselves as, and act as, publics" around each incident (p. 80). These issue publics cohere around and generate discourse about each event I analyze, and this discourse forms the basis of my analysis. To map and sample this discourse, I also take their technique of spanning across platforms (both digital and non-digital) to get a sense of the ways in which understandings of each incident flow across and are transformed by these different platforms rather than artificially restricting my analysis to a single platform. In sampling and mapping each event, I follow the discourse analytic method used by Braithwaite (2016) in her analysis of #Gamergate. Like Braithewaite, my mapping "resembles the 'snowball' approach," following the links between social media, online news, YouTube, newspapers, magazines, etc. to demonstrate the most salient features of each controversy rather than provide an exhaustive account of all media objects related to them (p. 3).

While this process of data collection operated differently across case studies as each celebrity incident involved different dynamics, I followed the same general protocol.[3] I began by collecting data from Twitter using relevant search terms and hashtags over a period of several days around each incident. Then, using Braithwaite's conception of digital snowball sampling, I added any links to webpages, videos, etc. included in these tweets to my data set. Next, I

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[3] The data set analyzed in chapter one, which focuses on the 2014 celebrity nude photo hack, is smaller than those in the rest of the chapters for several reasons. First, Twitter data is not accessible from the API after one year, and I began this project too late to be able to scrape any Twitter data. Further, the Internet forums on which the photos were circulated had either expired or been removed by the time I began this project. With these limitations, I opted to begin mapping the intersections of celebrity, feminism, and digital platforms on a smaller scale by focusing my analysis on online news and commentary outlets. With this foundation in place, subsequent chapters expand those insights with more diverse data sets. More detail about this research design can be found in chapter one.

searched the top newspapers, news and commentary websites (including websites for network

and cable news channels, which post much of their television content online), and magazines for

articles about each incident and added any other articles, videos, social media posts, etc. that

were hyperlinked or embedded in those articles to my data set as well. To augment these

methods of snowball sampling, I set my Google Chrome web browser to "incognito" to de-

individuate my search results and conducted Google and YouTube searches of relevant terms

over relevant time periods for each incident. For each incident I went to at least the tenth page of

search results for each term and added the relevant media objects to my data set. The resulting

data set is drawn from Twitter, YouTube, television, online news and commentary sites,

newspapers, and magazines.[4] In choosing which data to highlight in each chapter, I selected the

most highly circulated texts as well as those that most clearly illustrate themes that resonated

across platforms.

       To make sense of these data sets, I engaged in critical discourse analysis, focusing not

only on the content of each media object but also, in the vein of Brock's (2016) CTDA,

considering how that content may be informed by digital platforms. CTDA "broadly follows the

tenets of linguistic discourse analysis, incorporating the assumption that digitally mediated

discourse may be, but is not inevitably, shaped by the technological features of computer-

mediated communication systems" (p. 1017). To do so, I considered the ways in which the

specificities of each platform's interface, norms of use, and affordances shape the discourse in

each space. These insights of CTDA not only allow for a richer and more nuanced analysis, but

by utilizing this method comparatively across platforms, I am able to explore the interrelatedness

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[4] In total, the dataset consists of 12,292 media objects. It includes 11,300 tweets, 520 online news
and commentary articles, 242 articles from top US newspapers, 104 television/YouTube videos,
115 magazine articles, and 11 miscellaneous objects (such as Facebook or Instagram posts that
were highly circulated around an incident, or radio broadcasts).

of platforms across the media ecosystem while still remaining attentive to the specificities of each platform. Further, I conducted this analysis through an intersectional feminist theoretical lens. While intersectionality has been a somewhat contested term since Crenshaw's seminal argument (e.g. Lutz, Vivar, & Supik, 2011), I adopt what Erevelles and Minear (2010) call the intercategorical framework of intersectionality. Instead of piling on identity categories in their analysis of race, gender, sex, sexuality, disability, etc., they call for an examination of the structural conditions that mutually constitute these categories and their relationships to identity construction.

Structure of the Dissertation

The first chapter explores online news coverage of the 2014 celebrity nude photo hack in which hackers stole and disseminated celebrities' personal images on AnonIB, 4chan, and Reddit. I demonstrate that the feminist tone of the dominant discourse constructs the celebrities as innocent victims of patriarchal power structures and the hackers and online communities who shared the photos as disgusting perpetrators of misogyny. This case study sets up key dynamics that further chapters explore in more detail: feminist ideas as increasingly common sense in media coverage, celebrities as high profile but vulnerable figures that merit feminist support, online harassment, and a strong denigration of male-dominated online communities like 4chan and Reddit.

The next case study analyzes discussions of the 2015 Academy Awards, specifically the feminist #AskHerMore campaign that called for red carpet journalists to ask female celebrities substantive questions and Best Supporting Actress winner Patricia Arquette's problematic expressions of feminism on and off the Oscar stage. Building on the previous chapter's

exploration of celebrity culture as a place of feminist intervention, this case study examines how various understandings of women's value problematize the relationships between celebrity, feminism, and capitalism. Overall, discussions around the 2015 Oscars demonstrate the tense boundary work that goes on as networked publics use discussions of celebrity culture to shape developing definitions of platform feminism as a space of intersectionality.

In the third chapter, I explore the intersections of celebrity, feminism, and digital media through an analysis of discourse around Gloria Steinem and Madeleine Albright's controversial statements while supporting Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign. Expanding on the themes of boundary and definitional work, I demonstrate how Albright and Steinem's deployment of postfeminist critiques of modern feminism alongside their positions as white liberal feminists are misaligned with platform feminists' understanding of their political efficacy. This case study connects generational shifts within feminism to broader political shifts within the United States and emphasizes the growing dominance of platform feminism as the most salient iteration of feminism within media discourse.

The final chapter returns to the theme of online celebrity harassment raised in the first chapter, further exploring platform feminism as intersectional and supportive of celebrities who are victims of online harassment through an analysis of responses to alt-right trolls' attack on comedienne Leslie Jones in the summer of 2016. Supporters rallied around Jones to denigrate her attackers, called for increased protections for users on Twitter, and drew connections between the incident and structural inequalities as well as the rise of the alt-right and Trump's ascendance. As with coverage of the nude photo hack, the majority of social and mass media responses rebuked male-dominated online communities that provide a base of support for the alt-right;

however, these responses allowed members of the alt-right to frame themselves as victims, opening a discursive space for a performance of marginalization.

These four case studies demonstrate the way networked publics' dual responses of providing support and critique serve to incorporate certain ideas and actions into feminism while excluding or attempting to correct others. Further, the dominant discourse among mainstream media incorporated platform feminist ideas as commonsense responses to these events. In contrast to prior research that argues popular culture is largely postfeminist, I demonstrate that feminism, amplified by the broad reach of the digital spaces in which it appears and the famous voices that espouse it, has increased its discursive power so greatly that many aspects of popular culture no longer take for granted the gains of the feminist movement but rather feminism itself. Until late in 2017, this power was primarily relegated to the discursive and representational realm, feeding into feelings of disenfranchisement among anti-feminist conservatives while effecting no significant structural changes. However, the Weinstein scandal and subsequent amplification of the #MeToo campaign and the Time's Up initiative indicate that these discursive and representational shifts may begin to materialize into action and reform.

The key dynamics that are shaping the popular feminism of the "#MeToo era" as it relates to celebrity culture resonate throughout the celebrity events and scandals I discuss in this dissertation: celebrity support for legal interventions into gender equality, public concern for celebrity victims of harassment, feminist mobilization through social media to support celebrity victims and engage in awareness and activist campaigns, continuing issues of white-centrism and a lack of intersectionality within the feminist movement and the use of digital platforms to call out such failures, and the continuous connection of celebrity women's experiences of sexism and racism to those that characterize all women's experiences under patriarchal power relations. This

45

dissertation will help explain how we got here as we explore how feminism is being reshaped by celebrity culture and digital platforms.

Chapter One

Hacking Celebrity: Sexuality and Victimization in the Celebrity Nude Photo Hack

Introduction

On August 31, 2014, the Internet was abuzz after the release of hundreds of private nude

photos of female celebrities, colloquially referred to as "The Fappening." For months, a

collective of hackers had worked to penetrate Apple's iCloud storage, which automatically backs

up photos from devices such as iPhones. However, iCloud does not lock users out after a

number of incorrect login attempts, so the hackers engaged in a phishing scam and attacked by

brute force, guessing the usernames/email addresses and passwords of female celebrities until

they were able to access the accounts. While the exact circumstances that lead to the

dissemination of the photos is unknown, users involved in this hacking and photo-trading ring

began to post them on AnonIB, an anonymous imageboard where users primarily post

pornographic photos. From there, they quickly spread via 4chan and Reddit to various digital

networks across the world, and media outlets spent weeks covering the scandal.

To begin theorizing platform feminism through an examination of the ways in which

celebrity culture functions as a discursive site within which networked publics negotiate

responses to issues of gender, sexuality, this chapter takes as its focus online news discourse

about the celebrity nude photo hack and its construction of online vulnerabilities and sexual

norms. The hack and subsequent circulation of these photographs, and the publics that coalesced

around the incident, constitute a flashpoint at which mainstream audiences recognized the

vulnerability of digital platforms and, in particular, of women who engage with those platforms. This vulnerability was made manifest through an attack on celebrities, but the discourse made clear that it is embedded within broader patriarchal power structures that impact famous and non-famous women alike. The analysis of media coverage that follows, focusing on the discursive construction of both the female celebrities and the hackers and posters of the photos, provides a case study that not only explores the impact of celebrity culture and gossip on socio-cultural discussions of sexuality but also the ways in which those discussions provide insight into mainstream attitudes toward and contestation around feminist ideas. Overall, I argue that although coverage of the nude photo hack problematizes celebrities' sexuality through their relationships to publicity and occasionally acknowledges the complexity of communities like Reddit, the feminist tone of the dominant discourse defends and supports the celebrities as innocent victims of patriarchal power structures that affect not only celebrities but all women, while constructing the hackers and online communities who shared the photos as disgusting perpetrators of misogyny.

I begin by outlining previous research on celebrity sexuality and anonymous and pseudonymous online communities to provide a theoretical basis for analyzing the role of celebrity culture in reflecting and shaping norms around sexuality as well as the ways various affordances shape the types of online sociality that occur on platforms like Reddit and 4chan. I then turn to an analysis of the discourse around the celebrity victims of the hack. These online news outlets were overwhelmingly sympathetic to the celebrities, framing them as the victims of misogynistic power structures that affect famous and non-famous women. Next, I analyze the discourse around the hackers and sharers of the photographs, demonstrating that, while some articles acknowledged the complexity of platforms like Reddit, the majority discursively

constructed the publics that stole and circulated these images as untalented, disgusting, misogynistic criminals.

Celebrities and Sex

The media's role in the discursive construction of celebrity scandals as a site of social and moral debate is well established in the literature on celebrity. Gorin and Dubied's (2011) content analysis of celebrity news articles describes the prominence of scandals and "meltdowns." These dramatized tales of celebrity "failure, faults and scandals" present a macro-story that cuts across categories of social values, including sexuality (613). Media coverage of these meltdowns is often critical, reasserting conservative norms of behavior by judging and stigmatizing the "embodied behaviour" of these celebrities (615). However, although celebrity sex makes up a large portion of celebrity gossip, it is relatively understudied in the literature. Scholars who have explored celebrity sex (e.g. Mercer 2013; Knee 2006; Lawson 2015) locate audiences' preoccupation with celebrities' sexual lives and indiscretions in the celebrity's status as a fantasy object, pointing out that many celebrities' sexual desirability is part of their allure. Because their images are often predicated on their sexuality, celebrities "can expose the complicated and contradictory attitudes to sex and sexuality that exist within and across cultures" (Mercer 2013, 1).

The specific ways that celebrity bodies and the scandals in which they are involved provide fodder for the media and audiences to negotiate tensions around sexuality has been the subject of further research. In their framing analysis of online celebrity gossip stories about sex and reader comments on those stories, Van Den Bulck and Claessens (2013) find that both the coverage and audience responses articulate various social understandings of sexuality. While

they find that the celebrity news sites frame the stories without explicit judgment, readers use their discussions of celebrity sex scandals to take "the moral high ground" and openly criticize celebrities' sexual misconduct. In a more specific case study, Gamson (2001) engages in a narrative analysis of the media hype surrounding Jessica Hahn, who gained celebrity due to her involvement in the Jim Bakker sex scandal in 1987. Gamson finds that the discourses of celebrity/publicity and feminism have mapped onto the dominant and well-established virgin/whore dichotomy. He concludes that celebrity sex scandals mark celebrity women as innocent virgins or potentially empowered whores not only due to the sexual nature of these scandals but because of the celebrity's relationship to publicity.

Knee (2006) further explores the ways in which publicity, sexuality, and scandal mark the celebrity body in his analysis of two nude celebrity magazines. He argues that nude photos of celebrities draw on audiences' voyeuristic desire for authenticity from celebrities. That feeling of authenticity and intimacy is amplified because the magazines often frame the photos they publish as stolen and illicit. However, this illicitness is a farce because the images are nearly always constructed and controlled, just like the rest of the celebrity's public persona. While Knee's analysis helpfully contextualizes audience desire for the nude celebrity body, the key difference in this case study is that the photos released in the nude photo hack were intended to be private. Thus, the ways in which the media responds to the faults and failures of these celebrity women may be very different, allowing us to better understand the ways in which news media's participation in their discursive construction not only as virgins and/or whores but also as sexual victims.

Anonymous and Pseudonymous Online Communities

The early publicity of the stolen celebrity nude photos resulted from the efforts of members of AnonIB and 4chan, platforms that afford the possibility of what Massanari (2017) describes as "toxic technocultures" that often produce "e-bile," or a wide variety of gendered, racialized, and sexualized harassment (Jane 2014). Within these online communities, posters typically remain anonymous, and studies show that content remains on the most active board on 4chan for an average of just under four minutes before being "pruned" and disappearing from the servers (Bernstein et al 2011, 53). While no researchers have analyzed AnonIB, 4chan has received considerable scholarly attention. Although there are differences between the two in terms of content and site traffic, their interfaces, features, and communities are similar. Bernstein et al (2011) provide an overview of two of 4chan's key features: anonymity and ephemerality. They find that these two factors foster disinhibition and mob mentality. While they acknowledge the potentially negative implications of these features, their overall position is overwhelmingly positive, praising the unique sense of community they allow. However, this project will examine the nude photo hack as a negative outcome afforded by ephemerality and disinhibition on these sites. In a different take on the chaotic nature of 4chan due to its anonymity and ephemerality, Knuttila (2011) uses Heidegger's notion of "being" to think through what it means to "be" a part of the community. He argues that the anonymity of the site coupled with its ephemeral temporal sensation results in contingency and alterity. There is a constant sense of unknowability, both of the other members of which you are a part and of which content you will find when you load and reload the page. This ontology of contingency affords a public that exists in a particularly virtual and chaotic manner. These notions of contingency and alterity further help to explain the ways in

which the culture of 4chan is shaped by the interface of its site, lending a better understanding of the infrastructure that afforded the dissemination of these images.

News coverage of the occasionally toxic and even illegal activity housed on these sites has also been the subject of research. For example, Klein (2015) analyzes the news media's framing of Anonymous, the hacktivist arm of 4chan. Through a content analysis of 200 articles from 10 countries, Klein finds that the majority of the articles were negative, describing Anonymous as malicious pranksters or global threats. Because the methods Anonymous uses to engage in activism are nontraditional and counterhegemonic, their actions can be viewed as reckless, and media discourse tends to focus on their victims rather than their activist goals. While Anonymous may often hack for what they see as just, anti-establishment causes, the nude photo hackers engaged in "image-based sexual abuse" that targeted prominent women (McGlynn & Rackley, 2017). McGlynn and Rackley define image-based sexual abuse as "the non-consensual creation and/or distribution of private sexual images" and use the term to establish a continuum between image-based and other forms of sexual abuse. And research has shown that sexual crimes such as this hack are often covered sympathetically by the news media. In *Sex Crime and the Media*, Greer (2012) focuses not on hacker crime but rather the construction of sex crime in the press. He argues that the media's "unequivocal denunciation" of sex crimes provides a rare foundation for moral consensus that transcends different interest groups and political parties (41). The "emotional and commercial potency" of sex crime, combined with the increasing visibility and fear of sexual violence, provide a contextual playing field that makes sex crime newsworthy, especially when the crime is novel, proximate, personalized, and has a high "shock factor" (p. 56-7). This shock factor emerges due to novelty and deviation from the norm. Further, personalization is augmented when the victim or perpetrator is a celebrity,

elevating the shock factor of stories that would otherwise likely go unreported. These elements of sex crime reporting, combined with Klein's insights about coverage of hacker crimes, provide a foundation on which to build further knowledge of the news media's discursive construction of anonymous hackers as sexual victimizers.

Research design

In order to answer these questions, I engaged in a discourse analysis of how online news outlets discursively construct both the platforms themselves as well as the cultural practices that take place on AnonIB, 4chan, and Reddit. Because of the ephemerality of the sites, the nude photo hack is unknowable to the majority of audiences outside its media coverage. The coverage does more than just fix the meaning of the event; for most, it becomes the event itself.

I focused on online news outlets for two reasons. Much of the investigative journalism done on this story was initiated by online outlets, particularly *Gawker*, and analyzing online news will allow me to examine these key sources. Online news sources also produce more and more varied content due to fewer constraints than physical publication, so I was better able to analyze the complex and contradictory discourses around the event. I theoretically sampled two years of coverage of the hack (8/31/14-8/31/16) from six online news sources selected for their prominence and variance. First I examined the coverage of the hack on three prominent blogs that covered the hack: *Gawker*, *BuzzFeed*, and *Slate*. Further, because of the celebrity angle of the hack, much of the coverage took place on celebrity gossip and entertainment sites. Therefore, I also analyzed two celebrity gossip blogs: *Perez Hilton* and *Celebitchy*. Finally, I also analyzed coverage of the scandal in *Variety* to examine the different ways the hack was addressed from an industry perspective.

While all of these online news sources operate as ad-supported commercial media outlets, they vary in terms of their style and orientation toward the news they report. *BuzzFeed* posts a wide range of content that varies greatly in terms of content and depth. While perhaps best known for their "click-bait" listicles, DIYs, and quizzes, in 2011 they hired *Politico* writer Ben Smith as editor-in-chief to expand into more serious, long-form journalism. Since this time, the site has published more investigative pieces as well as in-depth critical analyses. Notably for this project, feminist media scholar Anne Helen Petersen and senior writer Charlie Warzel wrote sophisticated long-form articles digging into and analyzing the nude photo hack. *Gawker*, a controversial and now-defunct media and entertainment gossip site, often took a more antagonistic and critical stance toward its subjects. The flagship site of a group of blogs that include other prominent sites such as *Jezebel* and *io9*, *Gawker* was notable for its controversial and often anti-establishment stance. This penchant for crossing the line ultimately tanked the site after the editors lost a lawsuit for publishing a celebrity sex tape that was obtained illegally. *Gawker* engaged in much of the early, breaking news on the nude photo hack, and their coverage is notable for its derisive tone toward the hackers.

Slate is an online magazine that publishes articles and commentary on politics and culture. Often progressive in its politics and sophisticated in tone, *Slate*'s coverage of the hack was less plentiful but more thoughtful and analytical than most of the other sites, with the exception of some of the aforementioned work on *BuzzFeed*. In particular, writer Amanda Hess provided in-depth criticism and investigation into the hack and the online communities who instigated it. *Variety* is a media industries trade press that typically takes a more staid, objective stance toward the subjects it covers than sites like *Slate* or *Gawker*. While most of its coverage of the hack presented the news from an industry perspective and with little commentary, former

54

editor-in-chief Peter Bart wrote the most critical indictment of the celebrity victims featured in this sample.

The final two sources specifically publish celebrity gossip. *Perez Hilton,* one of the older and more notorious celebrity gossip sites on the web, features short, snarky posts. Known for his often malicious voice, Hilton has toned down his hatefulness toward many of his celebrity subjects in the past few years. His coverage of the hack is notable for his spat with actress and victim, Jennifer Lawrence, over his decision to post links to the nude photos as well as his overt sympathy toward reality television star and victim, Kim Kardashian. Finally, *Celebitchy* is a smaller gossip site that, in the years since the hack, has become increasingly vocal about progressive politics around gender and race. Although the site featured a somewhat feminist tone at the time of the hack, its coverage is notable for its lack of empathy for Kim Kardashian. I searched the archives of these online news sources using the following keywords: "Fappening," "nude photo hack," "nude photo," "hacker," "Reddit," "4chan," and "AnonIB." Through these searches, two types of articles emerged that referenced but were not directly about the nude photo hack. The first were articles about different topics that referenced the hack in passing (e.g. a *Celebitchy* article about Kristen Stewart's wardrobe malfunction, which included a source's statement comparing it to the hack). These were not included in the sample because such brief references yielded little data. The second type were those that used the nude photo hack to discuss broader, related issues (e.g. a *Slate* article that used the hack to discuss general issues with Apple security). These types of articles continually referenced the hack and utilized it as a way to talk about more systemic structural issues and thus were included in the sample.

After removing irrelevant articles, the total sample size was 118. I then coded four key elements of the articles: descriptions of the hackers, AnonIB, 4chan, Reddit; descriptions of the

celebrities; descriptions of the "crime"/scandal; and attributions of blame. After coding was

completed, I looked for themes that emerged with consistency across sources while also

remaining sensitive to the differences between the sources' attitudes toward and discursive

constructions of the events. In terms of content, the vast majority of all articles across sources

featured informational updates and commentary on the incident, with some inclusion of the

celebrity victims' own reactions to the hack. Ultimately, the descriptions of the hackers and

communities that shared the photos as well as the descriptions of the celebrities were the most

relevant to my research questions, so that data is the main focus of this analysis.

"God, I Feel So Bad For These Women": Constructing Celebrities as Innocent Victims

The most prominent way these six news outlets discussed the celebrities was as victims,

orienting their place within the scandal as sympathetic and disempowered. For example, in *Perez*

Hilton's first post about the story, he informs readers that "Jennifer Lawrence, Victoria Justice,

Kate Upton, and A LOT more celebrity women were victims of a HUGE hacking" (Hilton

2014a). His use of all capitals highlights the magnitude of the number of victims and the hack

itself, emphasizing the degree of their victimization. Further, writers often deployed the

descriptor to express outrage and empathy. In several early reports on the hack from *Celebitchy*,

gossip blogger Bedhead describes how "poor JLaw" and other female celebrities have been

"targeted" and "violated" by the hack, which has rendered them "victim[s]" and "vulnerable"

(Bedhead 2014b). In a compassionate aside consistent with the conversational tone of the site,

she also remarks, "God, I feel so bad for these women" (Bedhead 2014a). The prominence of

such descriptors emphasizes that the women were, above all, wronged and violated in a

significant way, encouraging the reading public to sympathize with their experiences.

Further, the majority of the articles made it clear that they were innocent victims. With the exception of *Variety*, each source featured one or more articles assessing reactions to the scandal that blamed the celebrities for taking and storing nude photographs. However, the focus of these articles was on the outrage such responses received. For example, *BuzzFeed* posted an article about British comedian Ricky Gervais's tweet, which read, "Celebrities, make it harder for hackers to get nude pics from your computer by not putting nude pics of yourself on your computer" (Barrow 2014; Gervais 2014). Although Gervais soon deleted the tweet, fellow members of this issue public took screenshots of his message and were able to disseminate it as an image within the confines of that platform and outside of Twitter, such as in this *BuzzFeed* article. While Twitter allows users to remove a tweet, it cannot prevent others from using functionalities like the ability to take a screenshot, which renders that tweet permanent. Ironically Gervais, like the celebrities he shamed, was unable to remove from circulation a text he wished to keep private because others utilized various technical affordances to disseminate information he had attempted to contain. Therefore, networked publics were able to call him out and hold him accountable even after he deleted the tweet. Indeed, *BuzzFeed* writer Jo Barrow explains that "Twitter was unimpressed" and posts nine users' tweets in response to Gervais denouncing his joke as victim blaming. By totalizing the diverse, varied, and complex networked publics on Twitter as uniformly disapproving of Gervais's comment, Barrow portrays such a reaction as dominant and common sense; to agree with Gervais is to incur the public's wrath, whereas the appropriate response is to understand the celebrities as blameless victims.

Secondly, much of the coverage focused on the gendered nature of the celebrities' victimhood, not only by pointing out the lack of male victims but by connecting the women's victimization to broader structural issues of sexism and misogyny. Much of the coverage

foregrounded gender subtly but insistently, referring to the celebrities as "women" or using the

descriptor of "female" before "celebrities" or "stars." While such coverage did not always

directly comment on the social inequalities and persistent objectification around women's bodies

and sexualities, the presence of this gendered language keeps their sex at the fore. Other writers

explicitly critique such inequalities by pointing out that almost no male celebrities were included

in the hack. In a particularly blunt example, *Celebitchy*'s first article on the subject notes, "Only

females were targeted in this hacking scheme. Of course" (Bedhead, 2014a). The connection of

their victimization to their gender was seen as a given; "of course" the targets of such sexual

attacks were only women. For *Celebitchy*'s self-identified feminist gossip writers, such

inequalities are expected. Similarly, although taking a much more sarcastic stance, *Gawker*'s

Jordan Sargent (2014a) asks, "Where the hell are all the dicks?" Overall, the writers'

foregrounding of the celebrities' femaleness begins to connect the scandal to structural sexual

inequalities.

Several of the articles, particularly those from *Gawker*, *BuzzFeed*, and *Slate*, went beyond

such subtle connections to explicitly critique the incidenct as embedded within patriarchal

structures of misogyny. These think-pieces were framed not episodically but thematically,

linking the hack to other celebrity scandals or, often, to broader issues of sexism and sexual

assault online. For example, in her *Gawker* article, "That Type of Girl Deserves It," lawyer and

feminist Reut Amit (2014) frames the celebrities not as famous but as "successful women,"

claiming the scandal has "nothing to do with celebrity" but rather is one instance of society

punishing women for immodesty. Anne Helen Petersen (2014) of *BuzzFeed* and Amanda Hess

(2014a) of *Slate* further debate the connections between the hack, celebrity, and misogyny.

Petersen likens the leak of Jennifer Lawrence's photos to nude photos of Marilyn Monroe that

surfaced without her consent early in her career, explaining that Monroe refused to be scandalized and rather incorporated the scandal into her star image. She suggests that, as viewers, we do the same and "perform the difficult but necessary labor of not being scandalized at all" by Lawrence's photos. Here, the burden lies with viewers to accept Lawrence's sexuality as normal and unsurprising. While she highlights issues of privacy and consent, ultimately the task is ours to interpret the photos "as feminists, fans of Lawrence, or just culturally progressive people" and not care about them. Hess takes Petersen to task for such a directive, claiming that "we should all be scandalized" by the hack. To take the nude photo hack in stride is not to rob the hackers of their power but rather to bow to it by failing to decry the various infrastructures that allowed for such violation. These debates around the hack attempt to understand and ultimately fix its meanings within broader systems of inequality. Moreover, what is particularly notable about these articles is that they assume their readership is made up of feminists. Their goal is not to convince readers to approach the incident from a feminist perspective; rather, they debate and negotiate the appropriate way to respond to the hack as feminists. This negotiation and debate is made easier through the affordances of digital platforms. For example, Hess links to Peterson's article, so readers can consume both and choose which they agree with. This negotiation enables a more complex and nuanced engagement with feminism and emerges as a key feature of platform feminism.

Image 3: In this image posted on PerezHilton.com, text over images of Jennifer Lawrence and Kate Upton tell readers these women are "just like you."

In further connecting the celebrities' plight to that of women writ large, much of the coverage focused on how celebrities were "just like us." Many articles used the nude photo hack as a springboard for discussions about account security, revenge porn, and online harassment that also affect "ordinary" women. A photo caption on *Perez Hilton* helpfully encapsulates this thread within the coverage; word bubbles coming out of Jennifer Lawrence and Kate Upton's mouths declare, "We're just like you! We get scammed, too!" (2014b). To that end, every outlet discussed broader issues of iCloud security and/or steps "we" as the viewing public should take to ensure that we are not victims of similar hacks (e.g. Hilton 2014f; Oremus 2014). Further, *Gawker*, *BuzzFeed*, and *Slate* all feature articles that deemphasize the uniqueness of this incident by explaining that "ordinary" women are also frequently hacked, and their photos are circulated on AnonIB and 4chan just like the celebrities'. This argument is typified in an in-depth look at AnonIB from Hess entitled, "Inside AnonIB, Where Hacking Is a Sport and Women's Bodies Are the Prize" (2014b). Here, she explains that the hack's famous victims are joined by thousands of ordinary women and treated as "property" and "objects" by members of AnonIB. Overall, the main thrust of the coverage makes connections between "us" and "them,"

emphasizing women's shared experiences at the hands of a digitally-enabled system of patriarchal exploitation that violates and commodifies women's bodies.

Image 4: This screenshot shows the landing page of Anonib in October 2015. The text shows different categories for different boards, including each state in the US.

Image 5: This screenshot shows an example post from the board labeled "Michigan" on 12 October 2015. On these boards, users post images of and information about women and ask fellow users to hack their photo accounts and send them images in exchange for cryptocurrency, and/or they share images of "wins," i.e. illicit images of women. In the post excerpted here, the original poster asks for "Any wins of this sexy stripper" and posts her image along with her first name and the initial of her last, which I have blurred. Responders then agree that they would like

61

to see the images, and one claims they "fucked her and it was bomb as hell." In response, another poster asks if he "pa[id] for it." Posts like this are typical.

While in many ways the discourse positioned celebrities as just like us, their fame and the magnitude of the publicity around this scandal set them apart by amplifying their victimization and rendering it spectacular and worthy of reportage and commentary. At times, writers deployed the nature of that fame, and various celebrities' relationships to publicity, to articulate differences between those who are victims and those who are unworthy of our sympathy or attention. One key example is *Celebitchy*'s article detailing the release of Kim Kardashian's nude photos in a second wave of leaks. Kaiser (2014), the author of the piece, opens sarcastically with: "Kim Kardashian got naked in front of some cameras. SHOCKING." After discussing the matter further, she retorts, "It's an invasion of privacy, feminism, men do not own our bodies, etc, let's not be gross, you get the picture. But in all honesty… no one is going to get worked up about this, are they? Kim Kardashian is famous because of a sex tape." While Kaiser knows that the "appropriate" response is feminist outrage, this article makes it clear Kardashian's exposure is nothing "to get worked up about" by virtue of her history of public sexual display. Just as Gamson (2001) argued in his analysis of Jessica Hahn, discourses of publicity map onto discourses of celebrity so that Kardashian, who is already a "publicity whore," is not a victim in the same way as "innocent" victims who have not previously exposed their bodies, like Lawrence.

Variety's Peter Bart (2014) took this lack of empathy for "publicity whore" celebrities a step further, generalizing all celebrities as narcissists and openly blaming them for their own victimization. One of a very few voices in my sample to do so, he asks, "Given their celebrity, why do stars allow themselves to get into such situations?" He answers his own question, saying

"the main motivation for stars' willingness to let such photos be taken is simple narcissism. Despite their public protestations, the reality is that they like being looked at… They just don't like the public to horn in on their fun and not pay for it." Taking a more industrial, economic approach to the scandal, he claims that celebrities' desire for privacy is hypocrisy – their lives are all about "attracting attention…until that moment when they denounce 'leave me alone'" – and thus their self-absorption and courting of publicity in their professional lives means that they must accept such publicity at all times. His tone and message are jarringly inconsistent with the rest of the discourse, going much further than even *Celebitchy* in his callousness and demonstrating that the line between public and private life for celebrities is not a given but must be negotiated.

These tensions around publicity and privacy, and the role of celebrity news within that dynamic, also surface in *Perez Hilton*'s coverage of the scandal. Unlike many other mainstream blogs, Hilton posted the photos on his site the day they leaked. He removed them after readers expressed outrage and posted a video response on YouTube (Hilton 2014d). By filming his apology and uploading it to YouTube, Hilton accomplishes several tasks. First, a video allows him to appear to speak more directly to his audience, affording his words a more intimate and potentially authentic air. This is especially true given his visible emotion, which can increase viewers' perceptions of authenticity (Sender 2012). Second, by using YouTube rather than the in-house video player his site often uses, which serves to keep video more proprietary as it is more difficult to link to or embed elsewhere, Hilton more easily enables others to share his apology across platforms. Because his choice to post the photos had provoked a certain level of controversy, this choice allows members of this issue public to circulate his apology within those outside conversations.

In the video, Hilton explains that he was "guilty" of posting the photos "without really thinking about the repercussions of [his] actions," explaining that he was on vacation with his family, saw the news, and felt it was his responsibility as a celebrity gossip blogger to disseminate the information quickly on his site." He declares that he decided to take them down because he "stopped to think" and because his readers "let [him] know [his] actions were wrong." Here, Hilton credits his readers for calling him out. Rather than labeling such actions as toxic (e.g. Risam 2015), he instead takes their feedback on his choice as motivation to reconsider his actions. Visibly distraught (or at least performatively so), Hilton demonstrates the tensions of reporting on celebrity scandals and negotiating the public/private boundary of which Bart is so dismissive. And while we might read Hilton's response cynically – he has a history of bullying celebrities and depends on his audience continuing to visit the site for his livelihood – like the dominant discourse around the celebrity victims, his video ultimately asserts that the appropriate response was outrage at their victimization, not complicity.

Although he apologized, Lawrence remained angry and mentioned him personally in her tell-all interview with *Vanity Fair* published later that year. She explained, "He took it down because people got pissed, and that's the only reason why… 'I just didn't think about it' is not an excuse. That is the exact issue itself" (Kashner, 2014). Here, Lawrence takes umbrage that Hilton thoughtlessly profited from her victimization, asserting that her privacy should trump his publication of her intimate photos, that he should consider her a "human" rather than simply a celebrity. She makes the same semantic moves the dominant discourse did, deemphasizing her fame and instead focusing on what she has in common with "us." Hilton, however, did not appreciate her response and posted another, this time furious video. He explains that he was "tempted to apologize to her again but, ya know what? No, fuck that" He tells Lawrence that she

"[doesn't] always get what she wants," emphasizing his genuineness in the previous video, and expressing his anger at her for describing him as a bad person (Hilton, 2014c). Now, when the publicity turns back onto Hilton, when he experiences firsthand a modicum of the embarrassment Lawrence suffered, he flips from contrite to vitriolic. Overall, this sub-scandal demonstrates that the commonsense response to the photos' release is anger and empathy, both for news outlets and, by extension, the viewing public.

Image 6: Jennifer Lawrence appears on the cover of Vanity Fair for her first interview about the hack, November 2014

"The Unwashed Boys of the Internet": Hackers, AnonIB, 4chan, and Reddit as Sexual Publics

Just as the celebrities' victimization was foregrounded in discourse, the most consistent description of both the hackers and members of AnonIB, 4chan, and Reddit was "creepy." Examples abound; *Gawker* referred to these groups as "horny creeps," "scum," and "skeevy" (Conaboy 2014; Juzwiak 2014; Cush 2014). *Slate* crudely referred to the hackers as both

"creeps" and "wretched little shits" (Honan 2014). Even entertainment-focused sites were derisive; *Celebitchy* called the thief "some hacker creep" and a "douche," and *Variety* described these groups as a totality that resides in the "Web's sleazier corners" (Bedhead 2014a; Celebitchy 2014; Spangler 2014a). The term "creep" denotes a stealthy, sneaking thief and/or a despicable, worthless person, as well as the disturbing feeling of something crawling over one's body ("Creep" 2010). The grouping of this term alongside "scum," "skeevy," and "wretched" amplifies the contemptibility and repugnance of these groups, not only for their abhorrent actions but also for their general sleaziness; they are, as *Gawker* describes them, "the unwashed boys of the Internet," and we as readers should be repulsed by them (Spangler 2014a).

As *Gawker*'s description of 4channers and Redditors as "boys" implies, these gross, sleazy characters are not to be respected. This lack of respect not only stems from the fact that they are "creeps" but also juvenile, immature criminals, and technologically unskilled criminals at that. Coverage across all six outlets refers to the hackers as "criminals" and "culprits" and describes the scandal as a "theft." While the main focus of the articles, particularly on *Gawker*, centers on the skeeviness of the "creeps" responsible, these news outlets make it clear that the hackers were not just guilty of icky behavior. That behavior was a crime that can, will, and should be prosecuted. As is particularly evident in *Perez Hilton*'s coverage of the nude photo hack, writers often openly hope for the arrests of the hackers. He calls for the FBI to "serve up some justice," emphasizing that the hackers "must be stopped" and expressing confusion and frustration that the "nefarious" culprits have not yet been caught (2014b; 2014e; 2014g; 2015). Overall, this emphasis on the criminality of the hackers in particular furthers our sense of disgust at their actions and locates that disgust not only in their "creepy" personal characteristics but in their illegal actions.

However, these outlets – and *BuzzFeed* in particular – make clear that the hackers are not to be respected for the hacking capabilities that enabled their criminality. While mainstream conceptions of hackers may consist of skillful coding wizards able to break into complex systems, the discourse around these hackers works to disabuse readers of those notions. *Gawker* calls them "rookie[s]," *Slate* derides them as "not terribly talented criminal[s]," and *Perez Hilton* points out that they "aren't geniuses" (Biddle 2015; Wolff 2015; Hilton 2014f). They explain that the "hackers" did not actually hack but rather scammed celebrities through phishing schemes or attacked by brute force, which requires little technical skill. If any readers were tempted to admire the hackers for their abilities to steal and disseminate the celebrities' photos, such descriptions discourage respect and foster derision.

BuzzFeed's coverage of this subject is particularly interesting, as they feature an investigative piece from Charlie Warzel (2014a), who traveled to Georgia to talk with Bryan Hamade, an early suspect[5] in the hack and leak, and his family and acquaintances. While Hamade's neighbor says she understands he is "very, very intelligent" and good with computers, Warzel explains that "the individuals behind most 'hacks' aren't technically skilled cyberpunk programmers – they are confidence men and creeps" who are "more web savvy than technical geniuses" and "often lead mundane lives in the physical world." Warzel explains that Hamade was "caught" by fellow 4channers and Redditors after he posted a screenshot of his desktop, claiming to have as-yet-unreleased photos. However, he neglected to blur out his homegroup and other computers on his network, and 4channers searched those clues and outed Hamade. Our first

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[5] Hamade was not the leader of the nude photo hacking ring and was never formally charged. In May 2016, a 36-year-old Pennsylvania man named Ryan Collins pleaded guilty to federal hacking charges and admitted to engaging in a two-year-long phishing scam to gain access to the celebrities' photos (Yuhas 2016). He was sentenced to 18 months in federal prison.

introduction to Hamade is through his thoughtlessness and carelessness about technological

matters, which was his undoing.
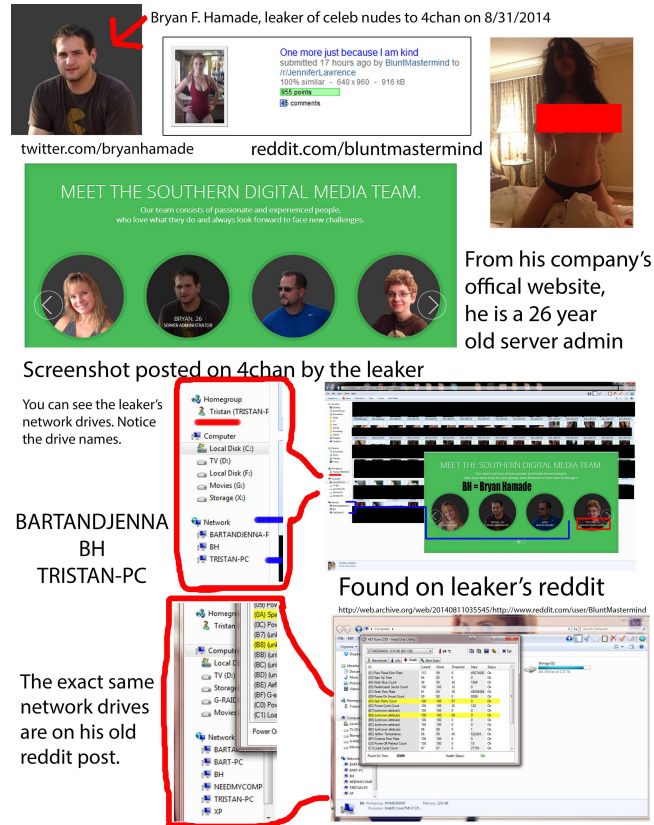
Image 7: This set of screenshots and text, depicting some of the "investigative" work that Reddit users engaged in to (erroneously) discover that Hamade was the hacker, was anonymously posted on imgur.com on September 1, 2014 and embedded in Warzel's article.

The rest of the article says little of his technical skills – although Warzel notes he was

able to scrub his web presence in less than a day after folks on 4chan and Reddit began hounding

him – and instead focuses on his "mundane" and rather sad life "in the physical world." Warzel

explains that he was "living in his mother's basement" and sarcastically notes that he was

"resting after a particularly busy day online" when he became the key suspect. Warzel says that

Hamade "barely seem[s] to exist outside the internet," and a family friend explains that "'he

really had no friends at all. He literally was a dude who was in the basement and played world of war craft [sic]…'" While Warzel describes Hamade as "tall and fit" upon finally meeting him, he closes the article with a quote from another family friend who describes him as "'a creep, weird, very childish, and immature.'" The piling on of these derogatory descriptions of his awkward, lonely life are consistent with stereotypes that have long been leveled at technologically savvy communities like gamers and programmers. However, Warzel only emphasizes these negative traits instead of detailing any of Hamade's prowess, inserting within the article derisive descriptions of modern hackers to undercut any speculations about his skills. Hamade's characterization encapsulates the discourse around the hackers and members of AnonIB, 4chan, and Reddit – he is a creepy loser and potentially a criminal who merits no respect.

However, the "creeps" who hacked and/or shared and viewed the photos like Hamade are not just criminals; according to these news outlets, they are also horny masturbators. *Gawker* engages in such descriptions most frequently, deriding the "horny creeps" on Reddit and 4chan "who like masturbating to non-consenting strangers" (Conaboy 2014; Biddle 2014a). They are described as "horndog[s]" and "enterprising masturbation enthusiast[s]" throughout the majority of *Gawker*'s coverage; indeed, one post detailing an FBI raid of a suspect's home describes him as one of "the brave men of Reddit and 4chan who masturbated" to the stolen nude photos (Cush 2014; Biddle 2014b; Biddle 2016). Such a consistent focus on the sexual desire and supposedly autoerotic proclivities of the hackers, sharers, and viewers on these online communities accomplishes several tasks. First, it locates the motive for the crime and violation in the desire for sexual release. While other motives are mentioned – namely, that users on AnonIB attempted to sell the photos in exchange for bitcoins – *Gawker*'s reliance on sexual descriptors discursively fixes members of these communities as prompted by sexual desire. Secondly, by constantly

69

referring to masturbation, *Gawker* emphasizes the solitariness of both the sexual act and, by extension, the user himself. Drawing again on the same stereotypes of weird, creepy loners that *BuzzFeed* used to describe Hamade, such descriptions further degrade these users.

Slate writer Eric Michael Johnson (2014) broaches the implications of these users' sexual desire more fully in his piece, "Misogyny Is Not Human Nature." He opens the piece by describing his imagined view of AnonIB, 4chan, and Reddit users:

> They went to great lengths to assert their masculinity by insisting how often they had jerked off in front of a screen being watched by other men. Like baboons sitting with their legs spread wide so that passing males could witness their small red phalluses, there was a mixture of sex and status involved in this public display.

This passage is the clearest encapsulation of the dominant discourse's construction of members of these online communities as a homogenized whole. Johnson emphasizes the imagined community that sprang up around the images; although these men are physically isolated from one another, they are members of the same sexual public that is oriented around these photographs, jockeying for status within it by bragging about their autoerotic sexual activities. Johnson goes on to reference scholarship from communications professor Whitney Phillips, who connects the actions of this group to misogyny and sexism. He then argues that such misogyny is not "natural," citing a study of a troop of baboons in Kenya whose males died off and, with a higher proportion of females in power, became much more cooperative and affiliative. This complex argument dislocates the scandal – its motivations and its implications – from the realm of the purely sexual and instead argues that the sexual nature of the crime is indicative of broader, though not inherent, structural issues of patriarchy. Just as the discourse constructed the celebrities as victims of misogyny, these men are its perpetrators. He calls for a change to such

patriarchal structures, indicating that an appropriate reading of this scandal not only rejects the actions of these men but mobilizes readers to restructure patriarchal systems of power.

However, while the majority of articles in the sample portrayed the hackers and sharers of the photographs negatively, some of the coverage provided a more neutral or balanced view. Unlike the other outlets, *Variety* was much more neutral in their tone, particularly with regard to Reddit. While they referred to AnonIB, 4chan, and Reddit as "the Web's sleazier corners" and called the hackers "habitual pervert predators," they were mostly neutral in their descriptions of 4chan and Reddit (Spangler 2014a; Spangler 2014b). Writers referred to 4chan as "an image-sharing site," and their three references to Reddit mention that the site banned r/TheFappening (Oldman 2014; Stedman 2014a; Spangler 2014a; Stedman 2014b). While they mention the sleaziness and predatory perversion amongst the hackers and sharers, their discourse foregrounds Reddit's attempts to stem the flow of the photos' dissemination rather than their role in propagating it. Further, *Slate* and *BuzzFeed* feature think-pieces dedicated to assessing Reddit in a critical but more balanced way. Both articles view the site as emblematic of the problems and promises of the "internet utopian [ideal]" of a "Wild West" where users self-govern (Auerbach 2014; Warzel 2014b). Indeed, Auerbach deems Reddit "either a miracle or a waste pile" while Warzel explains that it is "a shrine to the Internet we wanted, and that's a problem." Ultimately, both articles come down harshly on Reddit as a "sprawling site" with "toxic offshoots" (Warzel 2014b) and a lack of transparency toward its users (Auerbach 2014). However, this more multidimensional coverage of Reddit indicates that its status as "one of the most popular" sites online has rendered it more mainstream, accessible, and potentially palatable (Warzel 2014b). While it has, as Massanari (2015) would call them, toxic technocultures, Reddit has the potential to be a utopia, even if these authors are pessimistic about that possibility. As Banet-Weiser and

Miltner (2015) point out in their research on networked misogyny, the often toxic behavior that occurs within certain corners of platforms like Reddit and 4chan are embedded within structures of misogyny that extend beyond digital spaces, and even that toxicity needs be understood as drawing from and a part of the ideologies around sex and gender.

The Limits of Empathy: Conclusions on Innocence and Victimization

While on opposing ends of the scandal, both the celebrities and the hackers and online communities who shared their nude photos became known and discursively constructed by a much larger and broader public than they intended. The celebrities meant for their photos to remain private, shared only to viewers of their choosing. The hackers and traders of the photos circulated them under the radar for months, sharing and discussing the photos amongst themselves and constituting a relatively unknown sexual public. However, all groups fell victim to the permeability of the digital platforms in which they had placed their trust; the iCloud was fallible, and AnonIB, 4chan, and Reddit are widely accessible, even for users who do not typically frequent those sites. The massive data dump on August 31, 2014 attracted widespread mainstream attention, amplifying backstage practices and making them visible for public consumption, and allowing news outlets to discursively construct a dominant understanding of this ephemeral event and those involved in the scandal.

For both groups, the commonsense response was inflected with supposedly feminist ideals. Coverage of the celebrities downplays the "risky" behavior of taking and storing nude selfies by deemphasizing the spectacular nature of the scandal and instead emphasizing the interconnectedness of their actions and this scandal with the rest of "us." The celebrities are constructed as victims not only of the hack but of broader structural issues around women's

bodies, and because this scandal is just one instantiation of bigger issues that can and do affect all of us, they are, with some notable exceptions, innocent. Such findings are consistent with Greer's (2012) analysis that sex crimes cause outrage regardless of political ideologies. In contrast to Gorin and Dubied's (2011) argument that celebrity news reinforces conservative norms around sexuality and Van Den Bulck and Claessens's (2013) conclusion that coverage of celebrity sex is often neutral, this case study demonstrates that, as Gamson (2001) argued, discourses of feminism and publicity have mapped onto the discussions of celebrity sexuality to generate coverage that is overwhelmingly in favor of these women's sexual autonomy. The feminist bent of the media coverage emphasizes the celebrities' victimization, railing against patriarchal structures of power. However, the celebrities' relationships to publicity sometimes problematize their victimization, and celebrities who are constructed as narcissistic and/or who use their sexuality to gain publicity are undeserving of such victimization; the tensions around Hilton's coverage of the photos demonstrates how tricky the line between the public and private can be for the celebrities involved.

In contrast, the hackers and sharers of these photographs are derided because they are both sexually and socially deviant. While some of the coverage touches on the potential and promise of sites like AnonIB, 4chan, and Reddit, reflecting the more optimistic tone of the earlier work of Bernstein et al (2011), the dominant discourse focuses on "toxic technocultures" that emerged due to the affordances of anonymity and ephemerality on AnonIB and 4chan, and the organizational and moderating features of Reddit (Knuttila 2015; Massanari 2015). The distinctions between these platforms and the varied communities and publics they host were, for the most part, elided, and their members were collapsed into a homogenous, loathsome totality. The sexual desires of the men within these communities are derided as misogynistic and

undesirable, both legally and ideologically. Further, the focus on their masturbation –

encapsulated in the very name of the scandal, "The Fappening" – again emphasizes their

isolation from society. The expressions of sexuality the scandal enabled for them are not social

but rather solitary.

Overall, the feminist leanings of the discourse around the nude photo hack structure the

event as an almost perfect binary that leaves unexamined the grounds on which these

assumptions rest. The actions of the celebrities can be integrated into dominant understandings of

sexuality provided the women are understood as "innocent," i.e. that they do not seek publicity

and self-promote *too much* or, in particular, too sexually. Taking nude selfies meant to be private

or shared with a small, intimate public is socially acceptable within this view of feminism;

utilizing one's nude form as a key factor of fame, as Kardashian does, mitigates her

victimization. This disruption of the perfect binary the discourse lays out belies that problematic

claim to progressive feminist politics evident in this coverage; in a callback to regressive

dichotomies of the virgin and the whore, innocence is a precondition for privacy. It is also

important to note that the majority of the women whose photos were stolen were white women,

and race goes completely unmentioned in reporting on the hack. The feminist thrust of the

discourse, then, is dominant but lacks a sense of intersectionality. Certainly, the whiteness of

most of the victims aided their construction as innocent. These supposedly virtuous celebrity

women are allowed access to innocent victimhood at the hands of the gross, undesirable,

misogynistic hackers and sharers of their private photos. These one-dimensionally constructed

men are isolated from and bring disorder to the rest of society, and the coverage derides their

creepy, sleazy sexuality and criminality as reprehensible, and they are thus rejected by and from

dominant sexual norms.

The discourse around this incident provides foundational insights onto which subsequent chapters will build in order to come to terms with the intersections of celebrity, digital platforms, and feminism at this historical juncture, furthering a theorization of platform feminism. First, reactions to the nude photo hack demonstrate that celebrity culture functions as a platform on which broader issues of gender, sexuality, and digital platforms can be worked out. Celebrities experience gendered digital vulnerabilities that all women who engage on these platforms experience. The vulnerability of the iCloud platform rendered the celebrities vulnerable to attack from outsiders, and the "leakiness" of that platform, facilitated by the networked publics on AnonIB, Reddit, and 4 chan, allowed this leak to spread (Chun & Friedland, 2015). However, the platform of their fame amplifies their victimization, rendering it more visible and newsworthy. The discourse around this incident drew connections beyond celebrity culture to patriarchal structures more broadly and how they affect all women vis-à-vis sexual agency and harassment. This theme repeats in each chapter. Discourse around wage equality and Patricia Arquette's acceptance speech emphasized that the wage gap is not just in Hollywood but affects women everywhere, and her lack of intersectionality is not localized to her or to Hollywood but points to problems with white-centric feminism more broadly. Similar dynamics emerge around Gloria Steinem and Madeleine Albright's comments while campaigning for Hillary Clinton, when the dominant discourse emphasized the conflict as indicative of broader generational disconnects within the feminist movement. Further, discourse around the Leslie Jones attack emphasized that black women are the objects of vitriolic harassment in digital spaces and beyond all the time. This connection between Hollywood women and "the rest of us" is perhaps the clearest in the post-Weinstein reckoning and the Time's Up initiative: sexual harassment, and women's lack of recourse to stop it, spans across every industry. These celebrity incidents amplify dynamics that

exist within culture more broadly and make them newsworthy. Lifted up and constructed as objects of our focus on the platform of their fame, the experiences of these celebrities make visible such broader issues and open a space for public debate. And how the discourse treats these issues thus provides an excellent set of case studies where we can see on a large scale how dominant discourses around, in this case, feminism are developing.

Secondly, this incident establishes celebrity culture as a space where women are the victims of larger patriarchal structures of power. This opens celebrity culture up as a potential site of feminist intervention and support, consistent with dynamics at work in the #AskHerMore campaign and responses to the attack on Leslie Jones, and emphasizes the role of online platforms as spaces of both possibility and peril where celebrities can be victimized but also defended. Thus, this case study begins to map a time when feminist issues were coming closer to the fore of discussions of celebrity culture and accumulating. The processes of working to discursively filter out the representational power of the hackers and disseminators of the photos by rebuking them, augmented and amplified by the affordances of digital platforms, begin to demonstrate the processes of platform feminism and the ways in which networked publics use celebrity culture as a space to work out definitions of and boundaries around feminism. The unequivocal (and un-nuanced) damning of communities like 4chan and Reddit connects to similar dynamics around the unequivocal damning of alt-right harassers during the Jones attack, which served to bolster these men's performance of victimhood. While this incident itself is not overtly political in that the discourse does not explicitly connect it to the work of a specific political party, talk around this incident functions as a place where we can see these binary discourses come to a head and begin to coalesce.

Chapter Two

Staging Feminism: Award Show Activism and Celebrity Intervention at the 2015 Academy Awards

Introduction

During the events of the celebrity nude photo hack, the hackers and circulators of the images rendered the women they depicted as objects. Their actions transformed the women into commodities, valuable because of their appearance and their exposure, both literally because many of the images showed them in various stages of undress but also because their fame rendered them socially visible. As we saw in the previous chapter, the hack stimulated discussion about celebrity women and their representation, objectification, and value. And as 2014 came to a close, another hack – this time of Sony Pictures – amplified and added new layers to the conversation. Yet again, the vulnerability of digital platforms and the filtering of private information into the public sphere opened up a space for networked publics to coalesce around a celebrity incident and sparked a national discussion around feminist issues. To understand how discourses around the intersections of digital platforms, celebrity culture, and feminism further developed, this chapter analyzes the ways in which debates about intersectionality, activism, and women's value coalesced around the 2015 Academy Awards.

Even before the winners were announced on February 22, the 2015 Oscars were already a site of controversy around issues of identity. Most prominently, the Academy's failure to nominate Ava Duvernay for Best Director for her work in *Selma*, as well as any people of color for the four key acting awards, had sparked the #OscarsSoWhite campaign on social media and

moved Hollywood's lack of racial diversity to the forefront of Oscar conversations. Alongside and intersecting with this concern about the overwhelming whiteness of the impending awards ceremony were questions about how women were both represented and compensated. 2014 had planted the seeds for these frustrations. Female celebrities grew increasingly irritated with their perceived objectification on the red carpet, particularly with the advent of E!'s "Mani Cam" in which actresses walked their fingers down a miniature red carpet to show off their manicure and jewelry. Further, the hack and subsequent leaking of confidential information from Sony Pictures revealed the egregious wage disparity between men and women in the industry. In response, for both industry professionals and audiences, the 2015 Academy Awards became a site of feminist intervention.

This chapter examines two phenomena that framed the 2015 Oscars as a site of feminist activism – the #AskHerMore campaign and Patricia Arquette's Best Supporting Actress acceptance speech – to better understand the role this event played in the increasingly prominent and (at least performatively) activist nature of celebrity feminism during this time period. I begin by providing an historical overview of the Academy Awards, focusing on the evolving roles that fashion and politics have played during this media ritual over the past eight decades of its existence. Then I turn to an analysis of #AskHerMore, analyzing the two key readings of the campaign that dominated media discourse: those that framed the campaign as a feminist triumph and those that argued it was too superficial and misguided to enact any substantive change. Alongside an analysis of the main themes of the questions posed on Twitter as well as those that appeared on the red carpet, I demonstrate that the struggle over the values of the red carpet in the media coverage and in conversations amongst networked publics revealed a struggle over women's labor as actresses and as celebrities. Then I move from labor on the red carpet to the

Oscar stage, examining the discourse around Arquette's remarks on wage equality. After analyzing her remarks, I explore the mediated struggles over intersectionality's place within mainstream feminism by examining the arguments of her critics and her defenders. I end this section by questioning the role and efficacy of "imperfect" celebrity feminists in enacting structural change.

Overall, this chapter builds on the foundations of the first, exploring how celebrities can use their fame to amplify feminist issues, and how networked issue publics negotiate meanings around those issues. I argue that each of these case studies demonstrates the limits of the incorporation of liberal feminism into popular feminist discourses. While each campaign achieved varying types and degrees of "success," both ultimately left intact and unquestioned capitalist structures, opting instead to treat symptoms of patriarchal capitalism's impact on women. However, the critiques of those who called out these flawed feminist emissaries shifted the discourse, particularly with regard to intersectionality. Through this analysis, I begin to demonstrate how the processes of platform feminism coalesce around celebrity events like the 2015 Academy Awards, rendering them spaces of contestation where the broader values of feminist politics and action are negotiated.

Politics and Fashion at the Oscars: A Brief Historical Overview

While the Oscars and its red carpet have become a prominent media ritual since the ceremony was first broadcast on radio in 1932, they have been the subject of relatively little academic research. This section will provide historical background on the Academy Awards, review some notable politically-charged statements made throughout the ceremony's history, and discuss its relationship to celebrity and fashion. This contextual foundation provides the base of

this chapter's theoretical intervention as I analyze the implications of the 2015 Oscars with regard to the intersections of celebrity, platform feminism, and fashion in this age of real-time social media commentary.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was the brainchild of film producer and co-founder of MGM, Louis B. Mayer, in 1927. His goals in creating the organization and the awards ceremony were twofold. First, the growing power of labor unions amongst below-the-line workers threatened to destabilized the studio system, and Mayer believed that bringing together power players in the industry could help them unite "in squeezing out the labor unions" by functioning as an elite and more powerful organization of above-the-line workers (Levy 2002 11, 41). Mayer's second goal with the Academy was to assuage concerns about the morality of Hollywood. Several high-profile scandals in the early 1920's, most notably popular comedic actor Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle's alleged rape of Virginia Rappe, had spawned a wave of anxiety about the debauchery in Hollywood and talks of government censorship of the film industry. Mayer believed that the formation of the Academy could be a "public relations coup" that would help "establish the industry in the public mind as a respectable and legitimate institution, and its people as reputable individuals" (Levy 2002 11, 26). An awards ceremony would function as the public face of this respectability.

However, despite such lofty goals, controversy and politics inflected the awards ceremony from early on. For example, members of the Directors', Actors', and Writers' Guilds boycotted the ceremony in 1936 in protest of the Academy's failure to support them in their contract negotiations, as did Bette Davis when the Academy refused her 1941 request to transform the ceremony into a fundraiser for the Red Cross in response to the start of World War II (Sandler 2015, "The 14th Academy Awards" 2014). While conceived as a platform from

which the film industry could present itself as a distinguished, morally reputable group of professionals, others recognized that it could also function as a highly public platform of social agitation and political statement. Before Arquette's acceptance speech in favor of wage equality, other stars had made waves for using their time on stage to convey social and political messages. Most famously, in 1973, Marlon Brando refused to attend the Academy Awards. When he won Best Actor for his iconic performance in *The Godfather*, an Apache woman named Sacheen Littlefeather took to the stage and refused to take the statuette proffered by presenter Roger Moore (Lewis 2017). She said that she could not accept the award on his behalf because of his dismay at Hollywood's treatment of Native Americans and in protest of the incident at Wounded Knee earlier in the year. Her appearance sparked a great deal of controversy, from the loud jeers from the crowd as she exited the stage to critiques of Brando for using Littlefeather to manipulate the press. It has emerged as one of the most memorable and widely discussed moments in Oscars history, and marks the most bombastic and media-grabbing instance of a celebrity using the platform of the Oscars stage to make a political statement and garner a great deal of publicity for a cause. Others have similarly used the spotlight to highlight causes they find important, such as Richard Gere's 1993 Oscars statement in favor of freeing Tibet, or Michael Moore's chastisement of George W. Bush in 2002 (Lewis 2017). As Hollywood and sociopolitical issues have become increasingly intertwined in the last several decades, and especially over the last five years, such statements have become commonplace as the stage has become not only a place of performative respectability and Hollywood self-congratulation but also a space where speakers can engage with social issues.

However, more than political statements, and often even more than the awards themselves, the Academy Awards have become synonymous with fashion. While today media

outlets report breathlessly about the designer gowns, shoes, and jewelry on the Oscars red carpet, this focus on fashion was not always so central (Cosgrave 2007). For the first few decades, actresses had dresses made by costume designers they worked closely with, purchased gowns from department stores, or even made their dresses themselves. Then, in 1951, Marlene Dietrich showed up to the ceremony in a stunning black dress by fashion designer Christian Dior and, for the first time, a star's fashion choice made as many headlines as the winners themselves (Cosgrave 2007). This moment marked a sea change, where, in addition to costume designers, French couturiers and fashion designers began dressing actresses, often to much fanfare; for example, Audrey Hepburn's relationship to designer Hubert de Givenchy both on the red carpet and in her films put his name on the map and helped to shape her sophisticated, luxurious star persona (Cosgrave 2007).

While Oscar fashions shifted with the times – the rebellious political and cultural climate of the late 1960's and 70's prompted a looser, more casual approach – fashion continued to grow in importance and garnered a lot of publicity for stars who stood out. For example, Barbra Streisand's see-through pajama look during her 1969 win for her role in *Funny Girl* grabbed headlines, as did Cher's iconic 1986 Bob Mackie ensemble with its huge, feathered headdress. Designers began to understand that this publicity could work to their advantage, and in 1990 Giorgio Armani asked actresses to wear his gowns to the show, cost-free, launching a whole new approach to Oscar fashion. As the 90's progressed, designers increasingly began to see dressing stars, for the Oscars and beyond, as equivalent to launching multi-million dollar ad campaigns, such was the press they would get from the event (Cosgrave 2007). They wooed stars with extravagant gifts, vying for the chance to clothe them. These deals were often coordinated by stylists who vetted and curated selections for their celebrity clients. It was during this time that

Prada, Dolce and Gabbana, Valentino, and Vera Wang – now mainstays on red carpets – joined the ranks of Dior and Givenchy as major red carpet designers, and by 1997 they were paying stars lucrative contracts to wear their designs. It was around this turning point that the fashion industry overall became less focused on models as the faces of design houses and more on actresses; concurrent with an uptick overall in public interest in celebrity culture, both fashion designers and magazines like *Vogue* began to favor Hollywood stars over models for the press they garnered in publicizing fashion.

As the 20th century became the 21st, designers continue to court stars during the two-month long award season that culminates with the Oscars. Stylists field requests from major design houses, and stars often try on dozens if not well over 100 gowns to find the perfect dress. That's not even to mention the jewelers, shoe designers, and hair and makeup artists that go into crafting a perfect look for Oscar night. A far cry from early film actress Mary Pickford haggling with department stores for a discounted dress, Oscars fashion has transformed into a highly articulated machine of commercialism and aesthetics. This focus, constructed by The Representation Project as a devaluation of the actresses who walk the red carpet, thus became the target of the #AskHerMore campaign in 2014.

More Than Their Dresses: #AskHerMore and the Problem of Celebrity Red Carpet Representation

Although the #AskHerMore campaign was recognized across mainstream media and addressed by red carpet reporters in 2015, The Representation Project actually began the conversation in 2014. The Representation Project is an organization founded by filmmaker Jennifer Siebel Newsom, who created the organization as a way to critique sexist and misogynistic media representations of women, spread awareness, and try to foster change. The

Representation Project first launched the #AskHerMore campaign on February 28, 2014 ahead of the Academy Awards. In the short blurb on their website in which they announced the campaign, they explained the phenomenon that inspired #AskHerMore, saying, "Even at the Oscars, where we celebrate the highest artistic achievements in film, reporters often focus more on a woman's appearance than what she has accomplished" (Siddique 2014). With the hashtag, they explain that they will "send suggested questions to reporters, in real-time, whenever they risk devaluing the accomplishments of women in Hollywood, and to spark deeper conversations in front of a national television audience." Thus, from the beginning of the campaign, its organizers contested the meaning and values of the red carpet, working to reframe it as a space that celebrates the achievements and accomplishments of women rather than their fashion and appearance. To do so, the language conflates the awards ceremony itself with the broadcast of red carpet arrivals, and the body of the text never mentions the red carpet. While the red carpet is implied within the text, this slippage allows them to malign red carpet reporters' focus on appearance by emphasizing the purpose of the Oscars as recognizing talent and achievement, eliding the different rhetorical goals of each individual space by combining them into one. Further, they frame a focus on fashion as "devaluing" the actresses as artists, setting achievement and aesthetics in contrast to one another, while emphasizing the potential importance of the red carpet as a platform of feminist intervention by mentioning its "national television audience."

This short article was expanded in a 50-minute video Google Hangouts conversation between TRP allies Soraya Chemaly, Jaclyn Friedman, and Arturo Garcia, which was then posted on YouTube and linked in the post (The Representation Project 2014). This video demonstrates the deeply cross-platform, convergent nature of this particular digital feminist campaign and, indeed, of the majority of the platform ecosystem (Jenkins 2006, Van Dijck

84

2013). Just within this one text, TRP capitalized on the different affordances of at least four

different platforms – their website, Google Hangouts, some screen recording software, and

YouTube – to engage in discussion and debate as well as publicize and amplify that discussion.

Google Hangouts afforded Chemaly, Friedman, and Garcia the ability to video chat with one

another, which they were then able to record via some screen capturing software and upload onto

YouTube. YouTube afforded this otherwise ephemeral conversation permanence, which meant it

could then be shared via other social media platforms as well as their own website. This example

typifies the importance of considering the processes of platform feminism as not relegated to one

particular space, such as Twitter, but as deeply cross-platform. Its ability to move across

platforms enables a flexibility that the term "platform feminism" aims to capture. This flow

across platforms is a defining feature of platform feminism in part because, as we will see later,

it extends and deepens the possibility of contention and negotiation as not all members of this

issue public cosigned on #AskHerMore's articulation of feminism. But indeed, that very

contestation, enabled by the ways in which platforms intersect with one another, is crucial to the

processes of platform feminism.

In the video, the group explains that the real problem with the red carpet's focus on

appearance is its place within a broader media ecosystem that relies on the objectification of

women and places "women's value…in whether or not we look like pretty princesses" and leads

to a "homogenized" view of beauty. They call for non-fashion reporters on the Red Carpet to

engage in "real journalism" and focus on actresses as successful career women rather than

treating them as fashion models. Here, the elision between the Oscars and its red carpet arrivals

is gone, and instead the problem is less about the red carpet itself but more about broader media

values it communicates; namely, the objectification and devaluation of women. Here, the

#AskHerMore campaign becomes a way for concerned audiences to use the affordances to Twitter intervene in one part of this bigger problem which often seems inaccessible to the efforts of audiences who cannot directly influence such representations or hiring/wage decisions in Hollywood. However, enabled by the live-ness of the red carpet broadcast, the malleability of the interviewers' questions, and the ability of Twitter users to use the platform to communicate with media personalities, the red carpet broadcast became a place where intervention seemed possible.

The Representation Project, as well as many other news and commentary sites, connected this campaign to the actions of several celebrities on prior red carpets, namely actresses Cate Blanchett and Elisabeth Moss. Earlier in the 2014 awards season, Cate Blanchett called out E!'s "Glam Cam 360" on the Screen Actor's Guild Red Carpet. Upon noticing that the camera was starting at her feet and panning up her body, she leaned so that her face was in frame, pointed to the camera and said, "Do you do that to the guys?" (Our JoyLAND 2014). Later that month at the Golden Globe Awards, yet another E! Red Carpet prop, the "Mani Cam" (a miniature Red Carpet on which actresses were expected to show off their manicures and jewelry) became the focus of ire. While walking her fingers down the Mani Cam carpet, Elisabeth Moss flipped the camera her middle finger. With these two moves, Blanchett and Moss called attention to their objectification and its absurdity, which audiences often take as part and parcel of a social space like the red carpet. Blanchett, frustrated with the camera's objectifying gaze, spoke her irritation and criticized what she believed to be its gendered bias. And while Moss did not launch a critique per se, her refusal to participate in the admittedly ludicrous Mani Cam in a way that could be aired for audiences demonstrated a rebellion against the norms of the red carpet. Their actions were lauded across online platforms; Moss's actions were labeled "GLORIOUS" and "won" her the red carpet, while Blanchett was praised as a "badass" for "call[ing] out" red carpet

sexism (Jefferson 2014, Goodman 2014, Vagianos 2014). Thus for many members of this networked public, this violation of red carpet norms was not only acceptable but laudable. These responses framed these women's use of the red carpet as a space to call out gendered issues of representation as positive and important, laying the discursive groundwork for broader scale interventions like #AskHerMore.

Image 8: Amy Poehler's organization, Smart Girls, tweeted for followers to #AskHerMore on 22 February, the night of the 2015 Academy Awards.

The #AskHerMore campaign then came and went during the 2014 Oscars with relatively little fanfare. However, it gained traction the following year when it was publicized online by two A-list actresses: Amy Poehler and Reese Witherspoon. Poehler's organization targeted at encouraging young women's education and creativity, "Smart Girls," posted both on their site and across Twitter encouraging users to tweet them questions for celebrities that went beyond appearance. In a post on their blog that was widely circulated across Twitter a few days before the 2015 Oscars, the staff at Smart Girls (2015) echoed Blanchett and The Representation Project, stating that the red carpet promotes "a huge double standard in how men and women are treated in the media," arguing that appearance-focused questions "make it clear that [an actresses'] career takes a backseat to her appearance" while men face no such struggle. To

87

emphasize their point, they produced a parody video that featured actress Heather Morris lampooning the questions women get on the red carpet, such as "Who are you wearing?," queries about a "baby bump," and how she juggles family and career responsibilities (daralaine 2015). The video was viewed over 40,000 times on YouTube and was frequently shared on social media and included in news and commentary articles about the campaign as members of this networked public used the different platform's affordances of hyperlinking and embedding to amplify this media object. Just as Blanchett and Moss's actions worked to destabilize the norms of the red carpet, this parody calls attention to women's experiences within that social space. Morris's silly actions in response to such questions – for example, wearing "her grandmother" on the red carpet or literally pulling a baby from beneath her dress – frame these questions as absurd, unnecessary, and personally invasive. By working to expose what they see as wrong and sexist about the red carpet, Smart Girls aims to encourage social media users to take action and change it.

Additionally, Witherspoon (2015) posted an image on yet another social media platform, Instagram, to support and amplify the movement. The photo shows text that reads: "What's the biggest risk you've taken that you feel has paid off? What accomplishment are you most proud of? What potential do filmmakers and characters have to make change in the world? If you could play any character in any movie, who would it be? What's your favorite TV show? #askhermore" superimposed over a collage of women on the red carpet. Her caption emphasizes her love for the "movement" and states that, while she is "excited to share" fashion details, she would "also love to answer some of these Qs" before asking fans to share their own ideas. Witherspoon used the intersection of two platforms available to her – her fame and Instagram – which combined to give her nearly two million followers at the time of her posting to whom she could publicize this message ("reesewitherspoon Social Blade"). Just as with the Smart Girls

88

video, this post was remediated frequently across platforms and has nearly 20,000 likes. The suggested questions encourage reporters to move away from the standard questions critiqued in the Smart Girls video that focus on appearance and family. Instead, the questions focus on the actress's preferences, accomplishments, and goals. Though arguably trite in their platitudinal nature, they are questions that could be answered within the few minutes an actress would spend with a reporter on the red carpet and achieve the campaign's goal of moving the focus to the actress herself rather than solely on her appearance.

Image 9: Reese Witherspoon's highly circulated Instagram post in support of #AskHerMore on 22 February 2015

Red Carpet Rebellion: #AskHerMore and Feminist Success

Following a great deal of publicity, users flooded Twitter with alternative questions for red carpet reporters.[6] Most questions within my sample fell into one of four categories. The first asked actresses about their understanding, interpretation, and/or portrayal of their character or film. For example, users asked questions such as "Why do you think the #story of the #film you're in is so important? What stories still need to be told?" and "…What was your process for becoming that character?" Such questions aimed to get at the actress's process as an artist and as an intellectual participant in her own work. Consistent with the campaign's stated goal, this question eschewed a focus on the actresses' roles as fashion models but rather as thoughtful, analytical participants in the filmmaking process. The second expanded from their immediate work to the larger milieu of the Hollywood community, asking actresses about their mentors and role models as well as other workers they admire. For example, questions included, "Who has been a mentor to you in your career?" and "who has inspired you the most this year? which film did you enjoy most? who else would you have liked to seen [sic] nominated?" Such questions seek to place the actress within her broader context in Hollywood and to frame that context of one of helpfulness and appreciation. Beyond a focus on the actress as a thoughtful participant in the filmmaking process, these questions aim to understand the entertainment industry as a community of mentorship, inspiration, and admiration.

While such questions focused on the positivity of Hollywood, the third category of questions asked actresses about their impressions of inequality in the industry and/or their role in

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[6] The questions in this section are drawn from a random sample of 2500 tweets tagged #AskHerMore as well as the 300 most retweeted tweets with the hashtag between February 20-23, 2015. In order to preserve the anonymity of these users, I have not included their handles.

fighting it. Some asked about the struggle of women in the industry, asking, "What can we do to encourage more female voices in the entertainment industry as a whole?" and the disproportionate struggles of women of color, saying, "What's your advice to the women of color who are discouraged and struggling to make it in the entertainment business?" Such questions acknowledge the power structures within Hollywood that disadvantage women and people of color and asked for the actress's insight into those dynamics. These questions ask actresses to answer for the inequalities within the industry, presuming that these women care about such issues and are actively thinking about and working to change them. Finally, questions also broadened outside of Hollywood altogether to ask actresses about their work for social justice. For example, users asked, "What social issue would you become involved with if you had unlimited time and money? Why this particular issue?" and "How do u use your celebrity to address the many social justice and inequality issues affecting women and girls today?" Taken together, these questions frame, and ask actresses to frame themselves, as artists and conscientious citizens. They take the expectations of the red carpet as a ritual space of celebrity gossip, commercialism, and aesthetics, where actresses give soundbites about their films and sartorial choices, and reorient those expectations to include more complex sociocultural issues. This move reflects concurrent shifting expectations of celebrity women, demonstrating that celebrities are increasingly expected to engage in sociopolitical critique and activism.[7]

For many commentators, the results of the campaign on the red carpet were mixed. In the translation from social media campaign to a live televised broadcast, which has different goals

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[7] This increase in expectations that celebrities should speak to sociopolitical issues stems both from more celebrities' use of their platform to make their positions known and from journalists who ask them questions about politics and social issues. However, this trend is often maligned from critics who feel that celebrities are unqualified to speak on such topics. By arguing that #AskHerMore is part of a trend in celebrities' larger discursive role in sociopolitical discussions, I wish to highlight that reception of this trend is contentious.

and features, the intervention was only partially "successful." While I do not have space here to analyze each red carpet interview on E! (2015) and ABC (2015), I will discuss a few interviews that were most often discussed in the days after the broadcast. Consistent with her prominence as the face of the campaign, Witherspoon's response to ABC host Robin Roberts' question about her involvement with #AskHerMore was by far the most recirculated interview. Of the campaign, Witherspoon said, "This is a movement to, ya know, say we are more than just our dresses." After acknowledging that they appreciate the artists who make their gowns, she says, "This is a group of women, 44 nominees this year, Robin, that are women and we are so happy to be here and talk about the work that we have done." As the most talked about outcome of #AskHerMore, Witherspoon's response does little beyond reaffirming her support of the campaign. This result is thus circular – #AskHerMore was important and successful, transforming the red carpet because it generated responses on that red carpet about its own importance and success. The heavy remediation of Witherspoon's answer highlights the campaign's superficiality.

However, other actresses did have the opportunity to engage in more substantive banter with red carpet hosts. For example, Roberts asked Julianne Moore, who later won the Oscar for Best Actress for her role as a woman with Alzheimer's in *Still Alice*, about the disease. Moore took the opportunity to speak to the mistaken idea that Alzheimer's is a "normal condition of aging," explaining that it is actually the "sixth leading cause of death." Additionally, Ryan Seacrest on the E! broadcast asked Patricia Arquette about her charity work, and she responded that she was too busy to get a manicure this morning because she was working with an organization called GiveLove.org, which promotes ecological sanitation. Both of these questions and responses met the stated goals of the campaign and reflect the types of questions found on

92

Twitter; Moore and Arquette were given space to talk about their work. Although inevitably brief because of the nature of the red carpet, interviews like these did provide a platform for actresses to speak more deeply about their work and to shape their personas as thoughtful artists and activists.

But not all of the interviews abided by the missive to "ask her more," and Seacrest in particular was lambasted for asking several awkward, silly questions, which provided fodder for networked publics to push back on and contest as sexist and beneath the station of the women he spoke to. Most notably, after beginning with a focus on her dress, he asked *50 Shades of Grey* actress Dakota Johnson if her parents saw the film and which props she took home from the set. Johnson replied that her parents had not seen it and that she took home a "flogger," an S&M implement used in the movie. With these questions, Seacrest pressed Johnson not to talk about the substance of her role but to further its aura of raciness by implicitly asking about sex. The first question infantilizes Johnson, framing her as a daughter who may be embarrassed by her parents seeing her in a sexual situation. The second question then turns the tables to sexualize her, implicitly asking about the slippage between her characters' sexuality and her own. Both of these questions eschew frank or substantive discussions about the sex in the film, remaining at the level of giggly innuendo. In addition, many commentators criticized Seacrest for asking actress Naomi Watts about a frittata she had for breakfast. Watts obligingly listed off the ingredients she used, before Seacrest interrupted her to change the subject. From a gendered perspective, this question placed Watts, a highly respected actress, "back in the kitchen," framing her as domestically gifted; but beyond its potentially sexist implications, the question is awkward and unimaginative. Together, these questions demonstrate the dynamics that #AskHerMore attempted to combat: media figures' treatment of women in reductive, highly gendered ways.

And even with the spotlight placed onto red carpet questions, the presence of these moments demonstrates how difficult the norms of a longstanding media ritual like the televised broadcast of red carpet arrivals can be to shift.

However, despite these missteps, many members of this networked public lauded the campaign across platforms. Chief among the affirmative response to the movement, both by news reporters and commentators as well as by Twitter users who utilized the hashtag, was the notion that the #AskHerMore campaign was a rebellious feminist statement. Many began with a reiteration of The Representation Project's talking points, emphasizing the devaluation of women as a result of their supposed reduction to fashionistas rather than accomplished career women. For example, a *BuzzFeed* report on the campaign stated that the campaign was in response to people "devaluing the accomplishments women have made in the entertainment industry" and instead demanding that reporters "#AskHerMore questions of value" (Warren 2015). By framing the issue as one of values – both of the actresses' worth as an artist and worker as well as, implicitly, the cultural values the questions reflect – such language opens up a space where the intervention is not merely about representation but about what that representation tells us about how our culture values the contributions of women; in the words of TRP allies the campaign is thus "profoundly subversive." Accordingly, news, commentary, and social media users who agreed with such framing praised #AskHerMore, saying, for example, "It's powerful, it's gutsy, it's attention-grabbing, and it's exactly what we need" (Vaynshteyn 2015). While such aggressively hyperbolic language was not consistent across outlets, it is indicative of the perceived efficacy and importance of such a social media intervention into the representations and treatment of women in media. This attitude, alongside the attention the campaign received, cast for many a feminist glow over the awards show. Twitter users enthused that "there is a

paradigm shift in the air and it smells like progress" and that they were "digging the feminist theme of this year's #Oscars," while news and commentary outlets similarly praised the "feminist vibes heading into" the Oscar broadcast because of the campaign and concluded that "the 2015 Oscars were a damn good year for feminism" (Twitter post, Ryan 2015, Hodgson 2015). Thus the campaign – which neither called for nor incited systemic/structural changes, at least beyond the confines of the red carpet – became emblematic of "successful" feminism that enacts meaningful change. Its discursive power became both an indicator of as well as a stand-in for political feminism and/or activism (see Zeisler 2016).

This message was reinforced by TRP's founder, Jennifer Siebel Newsom, most clearly in a televised interview on *Entertainment Tonight* following the Oscars. Host Nancy O'Dell began the interview by reinforcing the success of the campaign, stating that it "changed the narrative of the red carpet," before turning to Newsom. Newsom said that the campaign had "25 million impressions" (presumably on Twitter) on the night of the Oscars and calls it "incredible," emphasizing that #AskHerMore is "changing the dialogue, changing the conversation, we're changing the culture just through women recognizing that they actually have an opportunity to challenge the media and say, 'Ask us more.'" (ET Online 2015). For Newsom, the campaign was capable of "changing the culture" through exposure and recognition – it was highly visible on social media, shifted some of the questions reporters asked on the red carpet, and brought some awareness to media biases. Thus, consistent with the name of her organization, The Representation Project, this campaign allowed audiences and celebrities to use their platforms – namely, Twitter and the stars' fame – to challenge one brief yet highly visible media representation of women and make a difference. However, the broader sociocultural dynamics that contribute to that representation, like differential gender expectations vis-à-vis appearance

and gendered inequalities that deeply structure power relations in Hollywood and beyond, went untouched. This campaign treated one symptom of a much more endemic and insidious problem, yet many, including its founder, framed it as a culture-shifting success.

While much of the discourse framed the campaign as a culture-changing success, this narrative of success does not take into account yet a different type of value generated by the campaign – the value that jumping on the bandwagon of a popular hashtag can have for social media users in terms of increasing exposure to audiences and user engagement. News and commentary outlets, such as *UpWorthy* and *Elle* magazine, and even brands like Goldie Blox, encouraged users to tweet red carpet questions at them for retweeting to reporters and/or posted links to stories using the hashtag on Twitter. For example, in an article posted on their website, *People* magazine staff (2015) wrote, "What would you ask some of Hollywood's most powerful females, if you had a chance? We posed the question to PEOPLE's Twitter followers to come up with their own #AskHerMore questions for Witherspoon." Further, Smart Girls, the main Twitter account that spearheaded asking for and retweeting questions, received a huge amount of exposure and engagement by participating in the campaign; and in turn users who tweeted at and were then retweeted by the Smart Girls account also gained exposure and engagement from other users. These actions likely drove some users to their websites, increasing traffic and boosting ad revenue, and their participation in a highly trending topic with at least a nominal gesture towards the increasingly marketable ideas of social justice and feminism helped these outlets and organizations to associate their brands with social consciousness. Both symbolically and materially, these actions added value to these users, outlets, and organizations.

Not only did media outlets and other organizations increase exposure and engagement by participating in the hashtag; so did many celebrities. Most prominent was Reese Witherspoon.

96

Her Instagram post was heavily recirculated in news and commentary about #AskHerMore, and she became the literal and figurative face of the campaign. The majority of online and legacy news and commentary articles in this sample acknowledged Witherspoon's key role in publicizing the campaign, with some even erroneously crediting her with starting it and many lauding her role without any mention of TRP or Smart Girls (e.g. Bender 2015, Boardman 2015, Alter 2015 to name just a few). Other stars chimed in on Twitter and, as is common with many news and commentary articles, their words were heavily remediated. Most notable were Lena Dunham, Maria Shriver, Shonda Rhimes, and Gloria Steinem. Dunham (2015) requested that reporters "Ask her about the causes she supports, not her support garments," while Shriver (2015) posited "What do you care about?" as an alternative to "What are you wearing?" and Steinem (2015) and Rhimes (2015) vouched support for and linked to the questions posed by MAKERS (2015). These celebrity voices added another dimension to the discourse and to the campaign; asking female celebrities more diverse and complicated questions is not a "movement" or desire that exists solely on the outside looking in at Hollywood, but also comes from within. Especially when that request comes from someone who will be on the red carpet, like Witherspoon, the campaign shifts from "ask her more" to "ask me more," lending it a greater sense of immediacy. Her voice thus became principally important in amplifying the campaign, by virtue of her use of social media to publicize it and the platform of her A-list fame. The other celebrities mentioned here also added greater "newsworthiness" to the topic by supporting the hashtag and giving reporters and commentators more content to work with, and Steinem's stamp of approval in particular added a sense of feminist legitimacy. Reciprocally, the newsworthiness of these celebrities' support also increased their exposure to audiences as their words were remediated across outlets. By using social media platforms to support the hashtag, these

celebrities further associated their brands with the increasingly marketable platform of feminist activism, increasing the exposure and value of that brand.

Take the Money and Walk: Critiquing #AskHerMore

However, not all of the discourse was so laudatory of the campaign as a great feminist success. Many, mostly in news and commentary articles that afford writers more space for expression and discussion than do platforms like Twitter, were critical of the campaign for several key reasons. The first is the economic structure of red carpet fashion. As mentioned early on in this chapter, dressing actresses on the red carpet became part of designers' advertising strategy beginning in the 1990s. This means that actresses get the dresses for free and often get paid quite handsomely to wear a certain designer's gown. For example, stylist Jessica Paster (whose clients have included such celebrities as Cate Blanchett, Emily Blunt, and Miranda Kerr), said that, in her experience, stars "often receive $100,000 to $250,000" from the designer Schweigershausen 2015). Jewelry can earn them even more, with reports stating that Tiffany & Co. paid Anne Hathaway $750,000 to wear their pieces to the Oscars in 2011 (Us Weekly Staff 2015). Because of these complimentary goods and payments, much of the discourse critiqued the idea that actresses should not talk about their clothing. Heather Cocks and Jessica Morgan (2015), who co-run the popular fashion blog, *Go Fug Yourself*, said on Twitter, "#askhermore is great, but it's ALSO okay to ask/say who you're wearing. You got it for free. It's a transaction. Tip your server…" In other words, brands dress stars for free or for a fee because the exposure of the red carpet adds value to their brand. Most viewers are not sartorially savvy enough to recognize a designer gown without the designer ID stated. Thus #AskHerMore can actually devalue the investment designers made in dressing celebrities for the red carpet.

Further, others emphasized that, contrary to the apparent impetus of #AskHerMore, actresses' careers and their sartorial decisions are in fact related to one another. If designers see that their investments in red carpet gowns are less valuable because they are not getting name-checked, that can impact a star's career and earnings in multiple ways. As Cosgrave (2015) pointed out in an article for CNN ahead of the Oscars, the red carpet is a kind of "audition" for more work and for magazine covers. The exposure gained by a stunning and highly discussed red carpet outing does more than increase the profile of the designer; it also increases the profile of the actress. Celebrities, whose star personas have always been deeply intertextual, stand to benefit greatly from this exposure, and an identity that includes that of "fashionista" can help actresses get more work; Lupita N'yongo was a common example of the power of red carpet fashion to catapult someone up the fame foodchain (Bourne 2015; Buckley 2015). Further, multiple voices in online commentary pieces ambivalently praised the earning potential of actresses from their red carpet appearances, especially in light of the overall gendered inequalities in Hollywood. For example, Moore (2015) states that this money can "help to offset the lower earnings and shorter career spans of women in Hollywood," where women are often 'phased out' before their male counterparts due to the gendered ageism that occurs not only in the entertainment industry but in society more broadly. Further, Goldstein (2015) argues that this is one of the few arenas in Hollywood in which women out-earn men; in her article, aptly titled, "Take the Money and Walk," she argues that the campaign does more harm to women than good. And unlike Newsom argued, the act of "changing the dialogue, changing the conversation" on the Oscars red carpet does not, in fact, change the culture of gendered inequality in Hollywood or elsewhere. The sexist, capitalist dynamics that value women's and men's work differently, as Moore and Goldstein point out, go untouched by #AskHerMore. Thus they and others used the

99

affordances of outlets like Glamour, The New York Times, and the Chicago Tribune, which allow writers to engage in longer-form critiques than other platforms like Twitter or Instagram, to take a more complex and nuanced approach to the campaign. In their estimation, they argue that the campaign's apparent frustration with fashion talk on the red carpet is misplaced and in fact harmful to the women who walk it.

Beyond these arguments that the fashion focus on the red carpet is indeed valuable to actresses, many also argued that, contrary to what Newsom and others might say, the campaign was not transformative in any meaningful way. In a piece for the *New York Times*, Buckley (2015) stated that the rapturous reporting of red carpet "rebellions" such as Moss's middle finger to the Mani Cam and other stars' refusal to use it "goes to show just how low the bar can be for what passes as a gender-equality push in Tinseltown." Others called #AskHerMore forgettable and "ridiculous," arguing that all it succeeded in was making the red carpet awkward and lumping the campaign in with "much hashtag activism" that "offers little more than symbolic gestures as solutions for endemic social ills, raising awareness and tweets for the fleeting virtual struggle du jour" (Hocking 2015). For commentators like Hocking, the symbolic struggle over representation on the red carpet does nothing to, as Newsom enthused, change the culture. Rather it is a small blip, signifying nothing of value, that comes and goes without substantial impact on the structures that shape the supposedly sexist dynamics of the red carpet. Others agreed, such as Miller (2015) whose *Time* magazine article on #AskHerMore was titled, "And the Award for Dumbest Hashtag Feminism Goes To…" Such criticism echoes critiques of social media "slacktivism" as lacking in substance and too ephemeral to generate lasting change. Scholars such as Bonilla and Rosa (2015) have pushed back against this idea, arguing that, even if a social media movement comes and goes, the affordance of permanence on spaces like Twitter means

that hashtag campaigns can "pile up" on one another and lead to a sense that there is a continuous push for social change. However, for many commentators in this dataset, #AskHerMore was a silly, misplaced, pointless campaign that made no actual impact on systematic structures of gender inequality.

In addition to these critiques within the discourse, events on the red carpet also revealed serious problems with #AskHerMore; namely, during an Oscar season fraught with racial tension foregrounded by #OscarsSoWhite, the campaign paid no attention to issues of race, nor did it gesture to the intersectionality of race and gender as it pertains to red carpet fashion. The additional representational burden of women of color came sharply into focus when longtime "E! News" and "Fashion Police" contributor Giuliana Rancic commented on Zendaya Coleman's red carpet look. Coleman, a young Black actress and singer most famous for her work on the Disney Channel as well as her sartorial and aesthetic choices, wore a slinky white Vivienne Westwood dress and had her hair styled into a beautiful mass of long, thick dreadlocks. During E!'s "Fashion Police" segment in which the hosts evaluate red carpet fashion, Rancic said of Coleman, "I feel like she smells like patchouli oil… maybe weed" (People staff 2015b). Rancic's comments were suffused with racist assumptions about African Americans and bias against Black hair textures. Rancic's lack of familiarity with locs moved her to trade on stereotypes of African Americans as drug users, while commentary on white actresses' aesthetic choices bore no such burden. Here, her commentary on Coleman's carpet appearance went beyond the supposed sexism and devaluation #AskHerMore was working against, demonstrating that Black women's appearance are evaluated and policed differently.

Coleman (2015) responded to Rancic's comments with a lengthy Instagram post. Using the intersection of her fame and this social media platform to amplify her message just as

101

Witherspoon did to publicize #AskHerMore, Zendaya said in part, "There is already harsh criticism of African American hair in society without the help of ignorant people who choose to judge others based on the curl of their hair. My wearing my hair in locs on an Oscar red carpet was to showcase them in a positive light, to remind people of color that our hair is good enough." Coleman pushes back by explicitly calling out the racism of Rancic's comments, laying it bare for critique and tying it to broader societal biases against Black hair. She then asserts that her choice to wear her hair in locs was to reclaim Black hair textures and styles as beautiful when they are so often dismissed and criticized in mainstream white culture, just as Rancic demonstrated. Rancic (2015) quickly apologized on Twitter, claiming she was "referring to a bohemian chic look" that had "NOTHING to do with race." While her "patchouli oil" comment does connote "hippie" cultures, this excuse simply adds another layer of white supremacy onto her words by associating locs with white "bohemian chic" aesthetics instead of the Black communities from which it was appropriated.

Further, by using social media to engage with one another in a very public way to work out this dispute rather than through the more traditional route of a formal statement through a publicist or an interview or guest column in a mainstream media publication, both Coleman and Rancic lend their words a sense of intimacy and authenticity (Marwick and boyd 2011). For Coleman, this move allows her to use her own voice to reclaim her appearance almost immediately while the controversy was still ongoing. For Rancic, using social media also allows her to respond quickly and personally, affording her apology the possibility of being seen as more authentic than if it were issued through a publicist. This Twitter apology was a quick precursor that attempted to stem the flow of critique until she responded with a longer form mea

culpa the following night on E! News, which gave her more time to craft a response (presumably

with the help of her management team given the obviously scripted nature of the apology).[8]

Overall, this incident demonstrates a much more complex set of dynamics around the

Oscar red carpet than #AskHerMore sought to address, namely because the campaign did not

acknowledge the factor of race. Its lack of intersectionality means that the goal of the hashtag

defaulted to white women who face the supposed "devaluation" of their work because of a focus

on their appearance; however, it failed to address how that focus on appearance functions

differently for different bodies, and how Hollywood and society more broadly differentially

value women based on their race.

"Wage Equality Once and for All": Patricia Arquette and the (White) Actress as Commodity

While the #AskHerMore campaign may have sought to increase representational

awareness of actresses' value and shift that representation in a supposedly more substantive

direction, events at the end of 2014 made clear another gendered inequality when it comes to an

actress's worth. On November 24, a group of hackers who called themselves the "Guardians of

Peace" leaked confidential data stolen from Sony Pictures, including personal information such

as salary data and emails. Some of the most widely-discussed pieces of information to come

from this leak were the wage disparities between women and men at the company, at every level,

including A-list actresses. Chief among them was Jennifer Lawrence. As reported by *The Daily*

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[8] It is interesting to note that the apology was posted on YouTube (as of June 19, 2018 it has, rather astonishingly, over 4 million views) but with the comments disabled (E! Entertainment 2015). Using this feature of the YouTube platform, E! attempted to stifle any negotiation or contestation over Rancic's statement within the confines of that particular platform. However, the conversation was able to continue on other platforms such as Twitter, blogs, etc., which further demonstrates the importance of the cross-platform nature of platformed social movements like platform feminism for enabling discussion and debate.

Beast, emails amongst executives Andrew Gumpert, Amy Pascal, and Doug Belgrad revealed that actresses Amy Adams and Jennifer Lawrence were paid considerably less than their male counterparts for their roles in the David O. Russell film, *American Hustle* (Boot 2014). The correspondence discussed the "points," or back-end compensation, each actor was to receive; Lawrence originally was at 5%, but her pay was bumped to be commensurate with Adams, who received 7%. However, actors Bradley Cooper, Jeremy Renner, Christian Bale, and director Russell each received 9%. This hack, similar to the celebrity nude photo hack, revealed not only the vulnerabilities of the platforms we often trust to store our personal information, but also the vulnerabilities of the people and institutions that use those platforms.

One way to make sense of these revelations is to consider them in terms of sociologist Erving Goffman's (1959) concepts of the front and backstage. Goffman used these terms to explain the split between more private and public presentations of self. The front stage describes spaces and situations in which people present their public faces, performing according to accepted public norms. In contrast, the back stage tends to describe more private spaces where this public performance falls away, and people can perform actions that they know would not be acceptable on the public stage. While gendered inequalities in pay were not new information and had long been publicly available, this front stage access to private communication that before operated within the backstage, this opportunity to see the machinations of wage inequality at work, was new and added a publicness to an injustice that typically occurs behind closed doors. Whereas the celebrity nude photo hack made victims vulnerable by laying bare their bodies and private activities for public consumption, the Sony hack laid bare the often egregious sexism that underlies the economics of the entertainment industry. The fact that it was Jennifer Lawrence, arguably the most famous and highly sought actress in Hollywood at the time, who was facing

104

this discrimination added both to its newsworthiness and to much of the public's outrage; if she, at the top of the A-list, could not command an equal salary to men, who possibly could?

This revelation spawned a great deal of discussion about the systematic inequalities within Hollywood, and many celebrities, including Patricia Arquette, weighed in. In an interview with *The Guardian* soon before her Oscar win, Arquette referenced the hack and its broader implications for equality in the United States, saying, "Women in America, we act like we have equality when the truth is we don't. With the Sony hack, it was recognised that those actresses worked every bit as hard, they were just as valuable commodities, they had won awards, they had huge followings and big audiences yet Jennifer [Lawrence] was paid less than the men?" (Iqbal 2015). Arquette's platform as a celebrity and, moreover, as an Oscar nominee, afforded her access to a profile in a prominent outlet like *The Guardian*, which she used to amplify the injustice of wage inequality.[9] Her framing of the issue places actresses' value as "commodities" squarely at the center of the injustice. Her incredulity centers on neoliberal notions of individual, and particularly celebrity, worth: hard work and marketability. This framing reifies actresses and actors as commodities who hold a great deal of value, not for themselves, but for the production companies who pay them as laborers. As saleable products, actresses like Lawrence are high quality – award-winning, popular commodities that draw in many consumers. By framing wage inequality in this way, Arquette highlights it as the purview of liberal rather than radical feminism. Understandably, considering her positionality as an actresses who would benefit from wage equality in Hollywood, her critique is not of the system that renders actresses commodities; rather, she critiques the system for compensating men's work differently. She does not advocate

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[9] For a more in-depth discussion of the role of interviews in shaping a star's persona, see chapter two of Gamson (2001).

dismantling these objectifying structures, but modifying them so that women and men are equally valuable commodities.

Arquette continued her focus on wage inequality when she won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress. As she stood upon the Oscar stage and closed her list of thank-yous, she said, "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." Arquette extended her comments from the platform of the celebrity interview to that of the Oscar stage. As with her comments in *The Guardian,* Arquette emphasized working within established power structures, this time of the government, calling for "taxpayers" and "citizens" to band together to support women's equality. In response to her speech, in arguably the most discussed and certainly most frequently gif-ed moment of the ceremony, the camera cut to Meryl Streep and Jennifer Lopez, seated next to one another and clapping and shouting their support for Arquette along with thunderous applause from the rest of the crowd. Unlike the jeering that followed Sacheen Littlefeather's politically-charged acceptance speech decades earlier, Arquette's words were met with acceptance and praise.
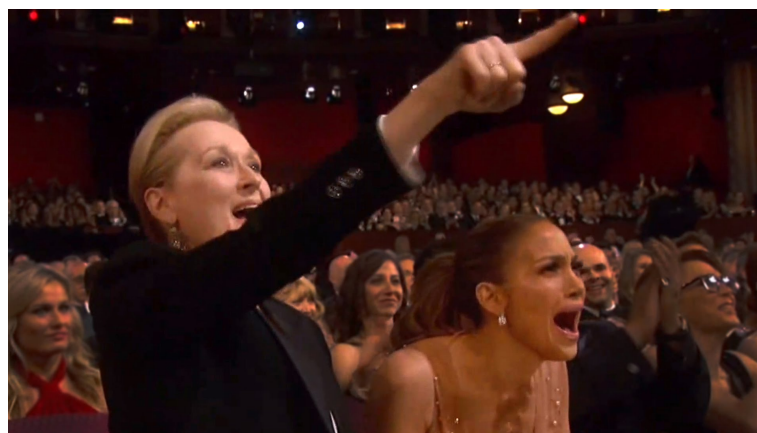
Image 10: Meryl Streep and Jennifer Lopez cheer during Arquette's speech

However, when Arquette went backstage following her win and expanded on this statement for reporters, she eroded much of the goodwill she had earned just moments before. Clutching her golden statuette, she reemphasized the pay inequalities in the United States. Then, shifting tactics, she said, "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." With this statement, Arquette demonstrated a skewed view of the history of the feminist movement and made it clear that, when speaking about the category of "women in America," she meant white, heterosexual women. First, her statement ignored the long history of the feminist movement's ostracization of women of color and LGBTQ women (e.g. hooks 1981, Collins 1989, Rich 1990, Crenshaw 1991). Further, she rhetorically divided her audience into four groups: women, men who love women, gay people, and people of color. By creating these discursive divisions, she implies that these categories are mutually exclusive. This division then frames "women" as straight and white and "men" as presumably white and definitely heterosexual. Her language silos gay people and people of color separately from "women" and even "men," defining them solely by their difference from straight, white people.

In an interesting parallel to the dynamics of the Sony hack that Arquette referenced when she began speaking out against wage inequality, here the tensions between the "front stage" and "back stage" reappear and become explicit. On the highly public platform of the Oscar stage, Arquette argued for the liberal feminist ideal of wage equality. However, upon leaving that "front stage" area for the literal backstage of the Dolby Theater, Arquette unintentionally laid bare the racist, heterosexist history of the feminist movement. Indeed, we can read these dynamics as a metaphor for liberal feminism overall; a movement that, on its front, appears to be progressive and in favor of equality yet, when you look behind the curtain, is built to preference

the goals of white, middle class, heterosexual women and disavow Black and LGBTQ women. For Arquette, the publicness of this backstage backfired, exposing the non-intersectional foundations of her liberal feminist platform for all to see.

#AskAWhiteFeminist: The Labor of Critiquing Patricia Arquette

While Arquette's use of the platforms of her fame and the Oscar stage to publicize the issue of wage inequality sparked a conversation that extended from Hollywood all the way to Washington, D.C., her non-intersectional comments backstage also gave rise to conversations about intersectionality and the problems with "white feminism." In the days following her speech, dozens of articles and television segments emerged that critiqued her backstage comments and explained the concept of intersectionality to a wide audience. From women's magazines to cable news to YouTube, commentators explained the controversy, saying that Arquette "sparked ire" when her feminist message "jumped the rails entirely by telling gay people and people of color that they needed to start fighting for women" (Rose 2015, Harris-Perry 2015). Critics explained that her comments "pretty much alienated women of color, both cis and queer" because she "flattened the fact that people embody multiple identities at once" (Global Grind 2015, McDonaugh 2015). Many vehemently disavowed this action as "anti-intersectional... cringe-inducing… [and] historically negligent," and, as a group of Black women commentators pointed out on *The Larry Wilmore Show*, that it was clear that "when [Arquette] says 'women,' she actually means 'white women'" (Zirin 2015, Hope 2015). These media outlets and speakers used multiple platforms, both legacy and digital, to call out Arquette's remarks and educate readers and viewers on intersectionality. Complicating the discourse that praised

108

Arquette's speech, which I will discuss in the next section, these voices flooded the discourse across a wide range of digital and legacy media platforms with information and critique.

But even more than calling out Arquette's lack of intersectionality, many pointed out that such a myopic take on the movement is emblematic of "white feminism," or the version of feminism that has historically dominated and takes the issues of white, heterosexual women as the basis of its platform while sidelining women of color and women in the LGBTQ community. Many of the most widely circulated articles about Arquette's comments addressed her white feminism; for example, Blue Telusma (2015) writing for *The Grio* explicitly marked Arquette's words as "racist" and indicative of why many Black women eschew the label of feminist – throughout history, the movement has frequently disavowed them. Similarly, Heather Barmore (2015) in *The Guardian* expressed her anger and hurt at Arquette's words, saying they continue "the deep rift between women of color feminists and their – our – white counterparts" and "exacerbated the ignorance" of white feminists through the implication that women of color and members of the LGBTQ women owe white women. Still others argued that her speech was "a paradigm of the failings of mainstream feminism boiled down into a single sentence: White woman feminist takes credit for entire movement, erases other identities and entitles herself to the support of the LGBTQ community and people of color;" so while much of the discourse constructed Arquette as the de facto face of the movement for wage equality, still others framed her as the face of white feminism and emblematic of broader issues within mainstream feminism (Berg 2015). Because Arquette's comments backstage laid bare the racist, homophobic history of the feminist movement, she opened the door for critical voices to explain her words in the context of this history and educate readers; thus for many, such as *Vox's* Kelsey McKinney

(2015), this incident became a moment when "the problem with modern feminism" came starkly to light: the "divide between what straight white women want and what everyone else wants."

While Arquette's anti-intersectional comments backstage were undoubtedly problematic, it is also worth exploring some inadvertently positive outcomes of those comments. Not only did the controversy help to amplify Arquette's message of wage equality, it also motivated the generation and amplification of corrective statements to push back on and call out her intersectionality. While some of these commentators may have arguably been too quick to "cancel" Arquette for her mistake, nonetheless messages about the importance of this issue of wage equality and a feminism that is intersectional and decenters whiteness circulated throughout the media discourse. This contestation and negotiation is key to the processes of platform feminism, but it often comes at the cost of emotional labor to marshal such critiques and deal with other members an issue public that might disagree with your take. The labor that is required for the negotiations of platform feminism to take place was central to Brittney C. Cooper's critique of Arquette's backstage remarks.

The most prominent voice in calling out Arquette's white feminism was undoubtedly Cooper, associate professor at Rutgers and co-founder of the Crunk Feminist Collective. The morning following the Academy Awards, Cooper took to Twitter to critique Arquette. She wrote, "Looking 4 ALL the white feminist thinkpieces ripping Patricia Arquette today, my polite way of saying, 'white feminists come get ur girl.'" (Cooper 2015a). Several users replied to the tweet, asking, "What's so bad about [Arquette's remarks]?" and "[B]ecause we can't simply be feminists without referencing race? why not?" To these Cooper responded, "#AskAWhiteFeminist." She continued to use the hashtag, tweeting, "Wonder why WOC give feminist movements the side eye, don't ask us. Consider Patricia Arquette & then

110

#AskAWhiteFeminist" and "Want thoughts about Patricia Arquette's fuckery. Don't ask Black feminists to do your labor. #AskAWhiteFeminist" (Cooper 2015b & 2015c).

After articulating this rather abbreviated discussion of the labor of call out culture on Twitter, a few days later she expanded her thoughts in an article for *Salon*. She says:

"When white feminists attempt with, what I imagine in Arquette's case, the best of intentions to be political, and then fail, there are two imagined proper responses from black feminists. One is to look past all that is wrong with what has been said, offer our fellow feminist the benefit of the doubt, and elevate the good. Never mind that impact matters infinitely more than intention. If white women meant well, that should be enough. The other demand is for black feminists to don the angry, indignant black feminist cape and proceed in a show of eloquent rage to get the errant white feminist in check. Though I'm pretty terrific at eloquent rage, I'm not going to do either." (Cooper 2015d)

She goes on to declare the she is "going on strike" from the labor of calling out and correcting ignorant white feminists, stating, "Asking black women and other women of color always to explain, show and prove to white people what is so wrong about what they have said or done, when we have no guarantees that they will change, shift or grow, is unacceptable. I demand better conditions of work."

Image 11: Brittney Cooper tweets about Patricia Arquette's acceptance speech on 23 February 2015

Just as members of TRP and Smart Girls did to amplify #AskHerMore, Cooper uses the particular affordances of different platforms to engage in different types of critique. On Twitter, she is able to quickly and succinctly express her frustration with the labor often requested of women of color to explain white feminists' lack of intersectionality. Further, she generates the hashtag, #AskAWhiteFeminist, which allows others on the platform to use the hashtag to add their own thoughts and enables all of those tweets to be automatically accumulated together.

Then, because of the platform available to her as a professor and prominent digital feminist voice, she was able to access another prominent and longer-form digital platform: *Salon*. This blog afforded her the space to expand and add nuance to her argument beyond what is possible on Twitter without creating a massive thread of tweets. Then, she and others are able to circulate her argument on *Salon* across social media through the affordance of hyperlinking. Again, Cooper's cross-platform critique of Arquette emphasizes the importance of analysis how platform feminism is shaped through a negotiative process that takes place in a wide and intersecting range of digital spaces.

Cooper's highly circulated, nuanced critique effectively turned Arquette's own invocation of unfair labor compensation around, deploying it as a critique not only of Arquette's message but also of the networked publics who use platforms like Twitter to demand the labor of women of color, either explicitly or implicitly. Cooper first explicitly marks Arquette's words as a feminist "fail;" a lack of intersectionality, despite the speaker's intentions, means that their attempt to "be political" as a feminist has not succeeded. But this failure is not what Cooper is interested in; rather, it is the social expectations for how Black feminists should react to such failures. The first option she describes forces the Black feminist to ignore the failings and support the white feminist, and the second is to call her out. The former, in many ways, makes the Black feminist complicit in her own oppression within the feminist movement and reifies the privileged position of white women within the movement. The second requires the expenditure of uncompensated and often maligned emotional labor and for her to inhabit the stereotype of the "angry Black woman." As Lisa Nakamura has argued (2015), the labor of calling out racism and misogyny typically falls on the shoulders of women of color, and this labor is emotionally taxing, devalued, and unpaid. And responses to Cooper's tweets make clear that this labor is not

113

just implicitly demanded when a woman of color encounters ambient racism and/or misogyny, whether on a social media platform like Twitter or an architectural platform like the Oscar stage; other members of the networked public around this incident explicitly demanded that labor, asking her to explain Arquette's mistakes and justify her own anger and frustration.

Cooper finds both of these options unbearable and thus vows to "go on strike," withholding her labor and instead directing people to "ask a white feminist." This move transfers the labor from her to white women, those who should be responsible for coming to "get [their] girl," as Cooper tweeted the morning after the Oscars. White women have benefitted from the structures of power within feminism that have disadvantaged Black women, and Cooper argues that she should not be further oppressed by being forced into the emotional labor of calling out and explaining white feminists' mistakes. She thus turns Arquette's arguments around; it is time for white women to support Black women by calling out their own and attempting to correct failures of intersectionality. While Arquette was concerned with women's devaluation compared to their male counterparts in the workplace, Cooper points out that, in the emotional workplace of social media, Black women's labor of calling out racism and misogyny is not merely devalued but totally uncompensated and, often, unwanted, inciting more racism and misogyny in its wake.

"No Good Deed Goes Unpunished": Supporting and Defending Arquette

However, not everyone held Arquette up to critique; many supported her, elided her lack of intersectionality, and even vehemently defended her against the "toxic" discourse that called out her damaging misstep. A significant proportion of commentators emphatically lauded her speech; *Mashable* tweeted that "@PattyArquette can have another award for that speech," while outlets like *Think Progress* and *The New Yorker* praised Arquette's "feminist bona fides" and

114

gave her speech an "A+" (Steiger 2015, Schulman 2015). These comments – that her feminism is

bona fide, A+, and award winning, serve to legitimize her and her message as prime examples of

feminism. This framing discursively constructs her and this version of feminism – liberal white

feminism – as not only dominant and appropriate but in fact a stellar exemplar of the movement.

Despite the brevity of her statement and the fact that wage equality is neither a new nor radical

feminist position, as well as the blatant anti-intersectionality of her backstage remarks, many

commentators fell over themselves to uphold her as a feminist ideal. Over and over, her speech

was called "badass," and, with the heavy recirculation of gifs of Meryl Streep's enthusiastic

response included in a majority of news and commentary about it, one message was abundantly

clear: "Meryl Streep's reaction should be your reaction, too" (Lockett 2015). For the majority of

the discourse, commentators framed support and even adulation as the commonsense response.

And, despite the myriad criticisms of her backstage comments as analyzed above, many

outlets provided cover for Arquette, ignoring entirely, failing to comment on, or openly excusing

her failure to speak intersectionally. For example, in an article about Arquette's speech in *The

Guardian*, authors Needham and Carroll (2015) wrote, "Backstage clutching her Oscar, Arquette

repeated her call for equality in Hollywood. 'It is time for us. Equal means equal.' It was

inexcusable that celebrities travelled the world preaching equal rights when at home 'under the

surface' women, gays and people of colour struggled to be treated equally, she said." This

framing mischaracterizes her statements, alleging that she argued for equality for women, gays,

and people of color. Beyond Needham and Carroll's failure to engage with her lack of

intersectionality, they in fact obscure it and misrepresent her statements as much more inclusive

than they were. This move serves to preserve Arquette's new status as a "badass," "A+" feminist,

implicitly reifying the dominance of white feminism. Further, *Access Hollywood* interviewed

Arquette to give her the opportunity to "respond to the haters," but never stated who those "haters" were or why some were critiquing her words (Feigenbaum 2015). By failing to explain why people criticized her, *Access Hollywood* similarly protects Arquette's legitimacy by delegitimizing those who disagreed with her as "haters," a term typically used to describe those who criticize without cause. These discursive moves obscure the nuances of the conversation around Arquette's remarks, framing her as intersectional to sidestep the fact that she was not and positioning her as the victim of unspecified "haters." These articles simplify the narrative and thus popular understandings of feminism, sugarcoating the bitterness of her lack of intersectionality for a more palatable, watered down liberal feminist message.

Others openly excused her behavior and asked for audiences to give her the benefit of the doubt. For example, *Variety* interviewed Lisa Maatz, a vice president of the American Association of University Women, about the backlash, and she said, "Unfortunately, no good deed goes unpunished," pointing out that Arquette is "not an expert, she's not a policy wonk who lives and breathes the ins and outs of this issue. She said what she felt, even though she may not have articulated it perfectly" (Lang 2015). Maatz's use of the phrase "no good deed goes unpunished" incorrectly frames critiques of Arquette's lack of intersectionality, making it seem as though critics were attacking her call for wage equality. Further, it not only excuses her damaging anti-intersectionality but also positions Arquette as the innocent victim of unwarranted punishment. She then excuses Arquette's misstep because she is a celebrity and cannot be expected to know the "ins and outs" of wage equality and, indeed, of feminist debates about intersectionality. However, this argument ignores several key points about the role of celebrity in popular feminism. By using the platforms of her fame and the Oscar stage to publicize wage equality and to associate her celebrity persona with that issue, Arquette purposefully inserted

116

herself in a highly public way into discourse about feminism. The publicity associated with both

of those related platforms means that, expert or not, for many she became the face of wage

equality and, by extension, the face of one form of liberal popular feminism. Because she entered

into this discourse in such a way, her remarks should face analysis and critique by other

members of this networked public; arguing that she should be exempt because she is a celebrity

misunderstands the role of celebrity in popular activism and works to shield her from legitimate

and important critiques of white feminism. Again, such a move preserves anti-intersectionality

as, if not the dominant, at least an excusable and still laudable orientation toward feminism for

some members of this issue public.

However, many went beyond covering for Arquette to lambast those who called her out.

Examples of this sentiment are plentiful and suffused with misogynistic language. For example,

an article in *The Daily Beast* praised Arquette's "vitally political" speech and maligned "the

usual shrill condemnation that awaits anyone who doesn't stick to the received feminist script

and also fails to include every other minority-within-a-minority concern in their speeches,"

lamenting that audiences "whingeing and selective parsing" drowned out "an important feminist

message" (Crocker 2015). Like those who praised Arquette and her speech as prime feminist

examples, Crocker frames her message as "vital" and "important," reifying the importance of

liberal feminist goals and placing Arquette on a pedestal from which shrill, whiny naysayers are

trying to take her down. Beyond using sexist, stereotypical language to describe Arquette's

critics, Crocker also presumes that there is a feminist party line, a "script," that presumably is

intersectional and overly politically correct to the point of absurdity. This characterization of

feminism as homogenous and militantly policed via call-out culture ignores the fact that

feminism is multifaceted and multivocal, as well as the important role of internal critique within

117

the movement. However, for Crocker, a focus on intersectionality and the calling out of feminists whose messages are not inclusive is unfair, again working to preserve the sanctity of Arquette's feminism and, by extension, feminism that focuses primarily on straight, white women.

Other online and print news commentators also criticized "the intersectionality crowd on Twitter," saying that it's "a waste of energy to be sniping at each other" and characterizing those who called Arquette out as "acid" (Nguyen 2015, Maschka 2015, Puente 2015). This discourse mirrors that analyzed by other scholars around prior incidents in which women of color feminists took to social media platforms to critique white feminism. For example, Loza (2014) and Risam (2015) analyzed women of color's digital responses to prominent white feminists who ignored and excluded women of color from the creation of a report about the state of online feminism called #FemFuture in 2013. In response to this event, as well other temporally proximate events in which white feminists had disenfranchised non-white voices, women of color feminists created the hashtag #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen to call out and protest their silencing. In response, mainstream discourse as well as responses from white feminists often framed this reaction as "toxic." This move to shame, silence, and discredit women of color for criticizing white feminists was thus not localized to the Arquette incident and reflects broader racialized power dynamics within the feminist movement that found voice within mainstream feminism at this particular moment. The dominant discourse worked to preserve the sanctity of Arquette's status as an ideal feminist, framing her liberal feminist call for wage equality as more important than her disenfranchisement of Black and LGBTQ women and demonstrating the prioritization of white women's issues over calls for intersectionality.

Sparking a Conversation, Energizing a Movement: Arquette as the Face of the Wage Equality Debate

While much of the discourse worked to cover and recover for Arquette's lack of intersectionality, Arquette's way of speaking about wage equality shifted after voices like Cooper called her out. Following her speech, Arquette took some ownership for her lack of intersectionality and endeavored to be more intersectional. The next day on Twitter, she emphasized that women of color "are the most negatively effected [sic] in wage inequality" and said, "Women stand together in this" (Arquette 2015). This time, her use of "women" seemed to include non-white women and acknowledged that women are differentially affected by wage inequality. As with Coleman and Rancic's use of social media to respond to controversy, Twitter enabled Arquette to use her own voice[10] to speak out and gave a sense of personal responsibility to her response. Months later, in December 2015, she continued to use her voice, this time mediated through *The Hollywood Reporter*, a well-regarded industry publication that lent her voice greater legitimacy and authority. In a guest column, she addressed the aftermath of her speech and said she blamed herself for her "stupid wording" backstage "that made some women feel left out or slighted." She stated that, following her speech, she had "learned a lot more about the feminist movement and how women of color have been left out of the process," and because of this greater understanding, she is "sad that [she] may have added to their feeling of being excluded." Unlike voices that criticized those who called Arquette out, she explains that this critique moved her to educate herself about the feminist movement's racist history. While this statement lacks a nuanced explanation of her words within the context of feminist history – and,

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[10] Authenticity is incredibly difficult if not impossible to determine on celebrities' social media accounts. However, Arquette's tweets demonstrate some of the hallmarks of authenticity described by Marwick and boyd (2011), namely some grammatical and punctuation errors. Overall, what is key to this argument is that her comments give the appearance of authenticity, whether or not others (such as managers of PR professionals) had input into her statement.

indeed, lacks an apology all together – she acknowledges her participation in the erasure of women of color and LGBTQ women. This is not to say that Arquette absolves herself of critique, but rather to acknowledge that the labor of many feminists in calling her out moved her discussion of wage equality in a more intersectional direction. Even if only nominally, that often-maligned labor made a difference.

As Arquette endeavored to be more intersectional in her framing of feminism, the mainstream discourse that praised her and continued to report on her activist efforts paved the way for her prominent role within a newly salient discourse on wage equality that continued, in Hollywood and beyond, throughout 2015 and into the following year. Despite the many voices that critiqued Arquette, she became one of, if not the, most prominent "face[s] of gender equality in Hollywood," and much of this continuing discourse referenced and credited her for bringing it such public attention (Conlon 2015). News and commentary outlets, including *Variety*, *Vogue UK*, *Glamour*, and *Elle* all cited her importance in making "pay disparity for actresses in both TV and film…a hot-button issue" (Setoodeh 2015). Commentators pointed out that her statement about wage equality "would be the first of many by high-profile actresses" during 2015 and 2016, and this public attention "sparked a broader conversation about income inequality" (Conlon 2015, Clark 2015). Indeed, outlets from *The Washington Post* to *The Wall Street Journal* to *Slate*, to name just a few, published detailed articles backed up with data contextualizing and explaining the wage gap following Arquette's speech. These articles explained that wage inequality in supposedly "ultraprogressive Hollywood" was still egregious, with reports showing that "the men on *Forbes*' list of top-paid actors for [2013] made 2½ times as much money as the top-paid actresses" and credited both the Sony hack and Arquette for bringing this issue to the fore (Woodruff 2015, McGregor 2015).

But more than a focus on Hollywood, the discourse connected the situation in the entertainment industry to that of women more broadly, pointing out that, "when it comes to the gender gap in wages, the entertainment industry looks like the rest of us" (Morath 2015). Other pieces discussed the wage gap in general, using statistics and expert economists to back up assertions that the wage gap is gendered as well as racialized. For example, *The Wall Street Journal* quoted economist Gary Burtless, saying, "'I have never seen anyone who has done a fair-minded study who fails to find there's a residual amount of discrimination against women" and featured another article that broke down "the gender wage gap in eight charts," while *The Washington Post* featured columns presenting research that shows the wage gap is exacerbated by race as well as motherhood (Morath 2015; Portlock 2015; Cassese, Barnes & Branton 2015; DePillis 2015). Even though Arquette's original comments lacked intersectionality, much of the discourse about the wage gap that sprung up because of the publicity of her statements did provide intersectional context and highlight how different the wage gap is for different women. All of this information was publicly available prior to Arquette's speech. However, her use of two platforms – her celebrity and the Oscar stage – allowed her to refract the attention audiences paid to her onto the issue of wage inequality and amplified its importance. She transferred some of the newsworthiness afforded to her, as a newly-minted Oscar winner, and to the Academy Awards, onto the wage gap. News and commentary outlets then produced content that contextualized her speech, capitalizing on a presumed uptick in interest on the topic.

Arquette's star power and participation in various events continued to propel the newsworthiness of the wage equality debate into the following year. She played a major role at several Hollywood events during which she gave speeches championing wage equality. Two key examples were the 2016 pre-Oscars Dinner for Equality and a Women in Film party, where

Arquette and Jennifer Lawrence (2015), who wrote an open letter about her thoughts on the wage gap several months after Arquette's speech, both spoke on the topic of the gendered pay disparity (e.g. Lowman 2016, Cohen 2016, Sage 2016). During this time Arquette also spoke beyond Hollywood at international conferences, such as the Milken Institute's Global Conference on women and girls' empowerment, where she called the wage disparity in the U.S. "long-standing systemic abuse" and asked conference attendees to demand transparency from their employers (Zumberge 2015). She also closed a gender equality rally at the UN Women Summit, highlighting the fact that women of color and women in the LGBTQ community face the worst wage disparity and addressing her role as an activist (Friedman 2015, Lee 2015). The controversy around her anti-intersectionality faded, and the discourse continually reaffirmed her importance, prominence, and success as a feminist interlocutor between Hollywood, the general public, and lawmakers. Her discursive misstep became less important than her positionality as the public face of the wage equality debate within the entertainment industry and beyond.

Further, and perhaps most significantly, many directly credited Arquette's speech with not only raising awareness about wage inequality but aiding in the passage of the California Fair Pay Act, SB 358. Just two days after Arquette's speech, State Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson introduced the bill "to feed off the momentum created by Arquette's speech" (Panzar 2015). Jackson had long been working on the bill as part of the California Legislative Women's Caucus and said of Arquette, "Her rallying cry has energized a movement that has long been calling for this," and "credited the news media attention with helping to raise momentum to pass the bill" (Ryzik 2016). Touted as the toughest such law in the country, it required that male and female employees performing "substantially similar" work be paid equally, whereas the previous law

only protected employees performing exactly the same job. The bill passed, was signed into law by Gov. Jerry Brown in October 2015, and went into effect on January 1, 2016.
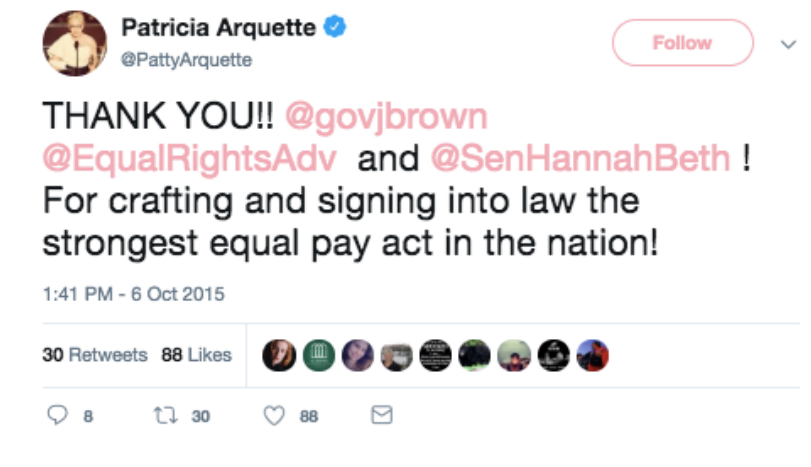
Image 12: Patricia Arquette took to Twitter on 6 October 2015 to thank California State Sen. Hannah-Beth Jackson and Gov. Jerry Brown for their work on SB 358.

This legislative achievement demonstrates the possibility of celebrity feminism. By using the platforms of fame and the Oscar stage, Arquette was able to momentarily elevate wage equality within the national discourse, creating a surge of public interest and outcry that lawmakers like Jackson were able to parlay into the state legislature's interest in the Fair Pay Act. While many scholars critique popular and celebrity feminism for their commercialization, and relative toothlessness, the passage of the California Fair Pay Act on the heels of Arquette's speech presents a relatively rare instance when discourse helped to manifest structural changes. Scholars such as Shelley Cobb (2018) have lamented that the efforts of celebrity feminists often obscure and overshadow the longstanding work of activists and legislators like Jackson who put in the hard work while the celebrity spokesperson often gets the credit, and this dynamic is certainly problematic. However, moments like this demonstrate that, with the right combination of public attention, legislative acumen, and fortuitous happenstance, celebrity feminism can help to breed concrete change.

Conclusions

The #AskHerMore campaign and Patricia Arquette approached the media ritual of the

Academy Awards as a highly public platform for feminism on which to discursively intervene in

gendered inequalities on two levels: representationally and economically. With #AskHerMore,

The Representation Project, Smart Girls, Reese Witherspoon, and other celebrities used the dual

platforms of celebrity and social media to construct the red carpet as a space where audiences

could use digital platforms to reshape the values of the red carpet. By encouraging users to call

for representational change, the campaign pushed for the red carpet to represent women as

valuable for their labor rather than their appearance; however, this intervention ignored the fact

that walking the red carpet is a form of labor that can add value to the celebrity as a commodity

as well as to the designer who dresses her. Further, the campaign failed to engage in this

intervention intersectionally, ignoring race and implicitly maintaining a focus on white women.

Then during her acceptance speech, Arquette used the dual platforms of fame and the Oscar

stage to publicize the gendered pay disparity and agitate for wage equality. But her anti-

intersectional comments laid bare the fundamentally white- and heterocentric foundations of

liberal feminism, ignoring that the labor of straight white women is valued differently from that

of women of color and/or LGBTQ women. Despite the nuanced critiques that circulated in

response to Arquette, the dominant narrative preserved her status as a feminist heroine,

emphasizing her determination and legal efficacy.

However, as this chapter demonstrates, one of the defining features of platform feminism

is the way in which the intersections of feminism and digital platforms around issues of celebrity

culture afford the possibility of debate and negotiation on a scale that was not possible through

legacy media platforms. As such, the often frenzied pace and content of these debates not only

amplifies certain feminist issues, such as wage equality or intersectionality, but it also more easily enables that debate to, when taken as a whole, emerge as more complex and nuanced because so many voices have access to platforms from which to speak. Those platforms are by no means created equal. Witherspoon, Arquette, and even Cooper were able to access certain platforms like the Oscar stage or *Salon*, which most members of these issue publics cannot, or had much larger audiences on more "democratic" platforms like Instagram or Twitter than the average users. These dynamics undoubtedly give more power to celebrities than to average users. However, especially because platforms are so deeply intertextual and content flows easily across their boundaries, more voices can be heard and amplified. Even if they do not become dominant, we have seen that they may shift the conversation.

From its inception, the Academy and its award ceremony centered on two key dynamics we see at play here in these non-intersectional feminist interventions at the 2015 Oscars: labor and values. Louis B. Mayer founded the Academy as an elite organization of above-the-line industry players to try to combat the impending unionization of below-the-line workers and created the awards ceremony to present Hollywood as a place of ethics and strong values. At their core, both of these goals aimed to achieve purely capitalistic goals, preserving high profits for those controlling the means of production and augmenting public support to ensure the continued financial viability of the entertainment industry. Similarly, while both #AskHerMore and Arquette's call for wage equality were framed (with varying levels of success) as rebellious, culture-changing feminist statements, they too centered on and reified structures of capitalism. Even as the #AskHerMore campaign sought for "more positive" representations of actresses by curtailing red carpet reporters' focus on their appearances, it worked to reinscribe them as laborers within a patriarchal capitalist system that it did little to critique. Similarly, Arquette's

125

call for wage equality was explicitly focused on increasing women's value as laborers and, indeed, as commodities. Legislators like Jackson used the momentum of her publicity to agitate for laws that would guarantee women equal pay to men while leaving in place capitalist power dynamics. To borrow a phrase from Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer (2017), these campaigns trafficked in feminism. These campaigns reinforced liberal feminist ideals, treating the symptoms of capitalism but leaving intact its structures, which serve to buttress and support the patriarchal dynamics they ostensibly aimed to disrupt.

These two case studies demonstrate both the perils and possibilities of popular feminism as refracted through the lens of celebrity culture, which is suffused with commodity capitalist logics and privileges white, heteronormative femininity. The #AskHerMore campaign stemmed from good intentions: to assert the value of women's intelligence and their work while pushing back against discourses that reduce them to their appearance. However, the campaign was too simplistic and superficial to accomplish any substantive change, ignoring the complexities of celebrity women's labor. Despite these shortcomings, much of the discourse framed it as a culture-changing success, demonstrating the sometimes-low bar celebrity feminism has to clear in order to gain mainstream accolades. On the other hand, Arquette's speech functioned as an avenue for substantive change, paving the way for legislators to capitalize on the attention she drew to the issue of wage equality and pass legislation. However, her lack of intersectionality problematized her image as a feminist heroine, and instead of substantively engaging with her as a flawed spokeswoman, much of the discourse instead worked to cover over her missteps and preserve her symbolic and discursive power. This move curtailed the transformative potential of this moment, reframing the critique not as a learning experience but as a problem to be ignored or vilified. But the labor of those who called Arquette out did motivate her to speak about wage

inequality in a more intersectional way as she continued her activist work; so while many

mainstream media outlets may have demonstrated an investment in preserving her and, by

extension, the values of white feminism, that investment was not totalizing. This controversy

exposed some cracks in the veneer of popular feminism's whiteness, and these cracks will

continue to grow in the coming chapters.

Ultimately, these two case studies build on and expand the framing we saw in the

previous chapter, expanding our understanding of the processes of platform feminism and some

ways in which celebrity culture functions within it. In particular, both of these case studies

emphasize that celebrities are vulnerable to gendered inequalities that impact not only famous

women but all women. Whether that inequality stems from digital sexual abuse, a value system

that prizes women for their appearance over their skills and knowledge, or compensates them

less than men for their labor, the discourses around these incidents argued that celebrities are, in

some ways, "just like us" – all women are oppressed under racist, capitalist patriarchal power

structures. The #AskHerMore campaign and Arquette's acceptance speech constitute part of a

larger moment in which feminism was becoming increasingly the purview of celebrity culture

and vice versa, with celebrity functioning as a platform on which audiences (through the use of

social media platforms like Twitter) and celebrities could engage in feminist intervention.

Further, this case study demonstrates the importance of digital platforms for the shifts in the

contemporary feminist movement. The red carpet broadcast and Arquette's speech during the

Oscars telecast both took place on a legacy media platform: live broadcast television. However,

in isolation, those televisual texts give us only a brief glimpse of the ways in which feminist

discourses informed the 2015 Academy Awards. It was the circulation of the #AskHerMore

campaign across social media outlets, predominantly Twitter, that were central to the changes to

the red carpet broadcast and its subsequent analysis across media outlets both digital and legacy. And it was the online conversations amongst networked publics that coalesced around Arquette's speech that informed the changes she made in her language around wage equality and brought the issue of intersectionality to the fore. This is not to say that digital platforms are unidirectionally causing the changes we are seeing in the feminist movement, nor that legacy media outlets like television no longer inform popular feminism. Instead, this case study demonstrates that it is the recirculation, re-mediation, and conversations around these legacy media objects in online spaces that afford the shifting dynamics in contemporary feminist discourses and activism. In the next chapter, we will examine another set of case studies that allow us to explore further the co-constitutions of celebrity, feminism, and networked publics, and the ways in which platform feminism is informed by contestation over intersectionality. Through an analysis of Gloria Steinem and Madeleine Albright's statements during Hillary Clinton's 2016 Presidential primary campaign, we will build on the insights from this chapter about the role of "imperfect" feminist spokeswomen who "misspeak" feminism and the networked publics who call them out. But this time, we will see how the dynamics change when those spokeswomen are not feminist celebrities but rather celebrity feminists, long-standing "icons" of the feminist movement, who are speaking directly about the ways feminism maps onto political decision-making.

Chapter Three

Nasty Women, Silly Girls: Fame, Feminism, and Hillary Clinton's 2016 Presidential Campaign

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we explored the role of the celebrity who uses her fame to amplify feminist issues and, in some cases, how that publicity can translate (or, in the case of #AskHerMore, fail to translate) into structural changes. This translation stems from an exchange, a flow across the platforms of celebrity, feminism, and politics, as well as a flow across digital and legacy media platforms. In the case of Patricia Arquette, her Oscar acceptance speech created an opening between the boundaries of celebrity and feminism that Sen. Hannah Beth Jackson was able to capitalize on. Arquette transferred the publicity she received while on the platform of the Oscar stage to the issue of wage equality, and Jackson was able to transform that publicity into enough momentum to pass legislation. In this chapter, we will explore the blurry boundaries of fame and feminism from a different perspective; this time by analyzing the role of celebrity feminists Gloria Steinem and Madeleine Albright. Unlike Arquette, these women achieved fame by virtue of their feminist activism and political work, and thus their roles within the feminist movement and as its public faces within society more broadly hold a different weight. However, like Arquette, Steinem and Albright both caused controversy and were called out for a lack of intersectionality and a failure to fully contend with both the history and the current state of the feminist movement. While this case study follows a similar narrative trajectory to that of Arquette, discourse around Steinem and Albright's comments allow us to

explore the different roles celebrity can take within platform feminism and national politics more broadly while examining the place of intersectional critique and the online practice of calling out at a later moment, just two weeks shy of the one-year anniversary of Arquette's speech.

In February 2016, the U.S. presidential primaries were in full swing. The Republican race was a cacophony of chaos, featuring the largest number of candidates in history, including the erratic Donald Trump. The Democratic candidates, Secretary Hillary Clinton and Senator Bernie Sanders, were maintaining a more civil competition, but tension between their supporters was beginning to bubble to the surface, particularly around one issue: gender. As news outlets breathlessly reported in the lead-up to the New Hampshire primary on February 9, Clinton was losing the young female vote to Sanders. This surprising turn of events, coupled with the increasingly virulent sexism of Sanders's vocal young male supporters (the very-millenially-monikered "Bernie Bros") placed Clinton's femaleness at the center of political analyses. While promoting her new book, feminist activist and Clinton surrogate, Gloria Steinem, was asked by Bill Maher for her thoughts on Clinton's lagging support among young women. After commenting that young women are "very activist" and "more feminist" than ever before, she changed gears by saying, "When you're young, you're thinking: 'Where are the boys? The boys are with Bernie.'" This comment, taken out of context, provoked instantaneous uproar on social media from feminists, many of them younger women, who supported Sanders. This furor was inadvertently compounded the following day when former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright stumped for Clinton at a campaign rally in New Hampshire. Referencing the fight for women's rights, Albright said, "There's a special place in hell for women who don't help each other!" Albright's oft-repeated quip took on a sinister tone with its proximity to Steinem's remark, and

suddenly commentators across media platforms were asking: what does it mean to vote as a woman, and as a feminist?

This chapter examines the online discourse around Steinem and Albright's comments in order to better understand the intersections of feminism, popular understandings of its history, celebrity, and political choice. The tensions that these incidents threw into stark relief offer insight into intergenerational feminist conflicts that can not only help to elucidate the processes of platform feminism and the place of celebrity within the movement, but also help us to understand one piece of the complex dynamics around gender, sex, and the 2016 Presidential election. My analysis shows that Steinem's comments demonstrated generational conflicts over neoliberal notions of choice while exposing the complications that can arise through celebrity feminism. Further, Albright's critique of young feminists as ahistorical clashed with critics who argued it was indeed Albright and Clinton's political histories, coupled with their insufficiently intersectional feminism, that moved young feminists to disavow Clinton. Overall, this case study demonstrates the work of this issue public to articulate a new feminist politics of choice. Defined in contrast both to a singular feminist party line as well as to postfeminist notions of irrational, individualistic choice, the politics of choice articulated within the discourse around this case study centers on intersectional collectivity and historically-informed rationality. Working within the tension between individuality and collectivity, Sanders supporters framed their decision-making as an individual, rational choice based on their understanding of how that choice affects others. However, because this definitional work occurred within a moment of outrage, the politics of choice served to emphasize generational differences and elided the continuities between various iterations of feminism.

My analysis begins by demonstrating how the media narrativization of this event as a catfight drew on sexist, ageist tropes and diminished the event's potential as an intergenerational feminist dialogue. Then I examine how Steinem's remark framed feminist choice and explore how her celebrity feminist authority backfired when she "misspoke" feminism, opening the door for the media to craft an intergenerational catfight. Finally I move on to analyze Albright's speech, demonstrating that her characterization of young feminists' ahistorical view of the movement was out of step with the discourse from her detractors, whose knowledge of Albright and Clinton's histories often moved them to repudiate their apparently non-intersectional feminist politics.

"Famous Feminist Fight!" Catfights and Intergenerational Conflicts in the News

In depicting conflicts that involve women, one key media narrative is the catfight. Both fiction and non-fiction texts often deploy this narrative framework to personify and dramatize female conflicts; in the news, this often means individualizing, oversimplifying, and bifurcating complex disagreements amongst women and amplifying certain voices as spokeswomen for each side (Douglas 1995, p 225). By reasserting "competitive individualism" over "claims about sisterhood," the catfight is particularly potent when looking at media narratives involving the feminist movement (Douglas 1995, p 223). In this particular case study, critics often elided the differences between Steinem, Albright, and Clinton in relation to feminism, collapsing them into a monolith that came to personify the "old guard" of feminism, a staunch, "establishment" group of second wavers who were out of touch with "modern feminism." Modern feminism is less explicitly personified, although it does have some famous voices – actresses Susan Sarandon and Emily Ratjakowski are quoted often and will be discussed further in later sections – but was

132

typically framed as a collective of thoughtful, frustrated young feminists who are more intersectional than their feminist foremothers. This dichotomy – between three famous, older women and a group of idealistic young women – sets up dynamics that ultimately favor the more "radical" positionalities of the younger women and denigrate the moderate positionalities of Steinem, Albright, and Clinton. These findings provide a contrast to earlier research that found moderate feminist goals were amplified at the expense of radical ideas (e.g. Mendes 2014, Douglas 1995). This more favorable coverage was undoubtedly compounded by the media's strong bias towards young people, particularly young women, and its tendency to villainize and/or ignore older women.

Across media platforms, the uproar that resulted after Steinem and Albright's comments was framed as a woman-on-woman fight. Outraged women used Twitter to lambast Steinem and Albright's comments, pledging again and again to continue to support Sanders's campaign financially and to vote for him at the polls. Accomplishing quite the opposite task from their goal of drumming up support for Clinton amongst her detractors, reactions on Twitter show that Sanders's supporters became even more entrenched by their anger over these perceived slights. This anger and conflict was then framed in the news, as the *Today Show* (2016) called it, as a "famous feminist fight," a battle between older celebrity feminists and young, idealistic feminist voters. One example of this narrativization that was cited and critiqued by several feminist critics was Alan Rappeport's (2016) article for *The New York Times*. The title of the piece in the paper was "Female Icons Tell the Young to Get With It," which frames the conflict as a "generational clash" in which Steinem and Albright told young voters to "grow up and get with the program" and "scolded" any women who disagreed with them (p A1). The dismissive framing of "getting with the program" – presumably some sort of Democratic feminist party line – reduces the

133

complex struggle over how feminists today are grappling with political issues and translating those thoughts into political decisions into a scuffle between younger and older women. His use of the word "scold" in particular draws sexist connotations of a nagging mother rebuking her daughter, an ageist narrative that diminishes the fierce feminist boundary work that went on amongst networked feminist publics around this issue to a trivial spat. The article was published online with the title "Gloria Steinem and Madeleine Albright Scold Young Women Backing Bernie Sanders," but, after backlash from readers, editors changed "Scold" to "Rebuke."[11] While tamping down on the gendered language slightly, this highly-circulated article nevertheless retained the catfight narrative as central.

As demonstrated by Rappeport's article, the catfight was framed as a generational conflict between older and younger feminists, with voices on each side lashing out. Susan Faludi, echoing Henry's (2004) analysis of younger feminists as rebellious daughters to their second wave mothers, asserted that young women were supporting Sanders because they wanted to be "where the mothers aren't," locating young voters' disapproval of Clinton in narratives of angsty teen rebellion. Others echoed Steinem and Albright's implication that young women do not sufficiently understand sexism, asserting that "when women are young [they] have not yet 'woken up' to all the ways men affect their lives" and opinions (Bohanon 2016). In an attempt to come to grips with the reasons young feminists were not supporting Clinton's candidacy, her supporters often tried to locate those decisions outside of logical political choice; for example, in the realms of rebellion or ignorance to the reality of patriarchal power. In response to critiques that often downplayed their capacity to make rational decisions, critics of Steinem and Albright

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[11] This change is not noted within the article, but the original title is still viewable through the Way Back Machine web archive:
https://web.archive.org/web/20160207220355/http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/08/us/politics/gloria-steinem-madeleine-albright-hillary-clinton-bernie-sanders.html?_r=0

also leaned into the ageist conflict, saying the women seemed "stuck in a time warp," demonstrated an "outdated (and establishment) way of thinking about gender politics," and did not respect young feminists the way young feminists respect them (Goodwin 2016; Foroohar 2016; Glennon 2016). The mother/daughter parallels here are also clear. If young feminists are rebellious daughters who have not had enough experiences to understand the "real world," second wave Clinton supporters are behind the times, ignorant to supposedly modern feminist innovations like intersectionality, who do not take seriously their deferential daughters.

A couple of prominent white feminist writers criticized this framing in online commentary pieces. Amanda Marcotte (2016) expressed her frustration with Steinem and Albright for playing into the media's love of a catfight when they "should have known better in the first place" and fought against it. While the tendency for the media to rely on the catfight narrative is sexist and out of the control of its subjects, this argument points out that Steinem and Albright have been celebrity feminists for decades. With such prominence comes a responsibility to think carefully about how one's words will be taken up, and thus Marcotte placed some of the blame on Steinem and Albright for using language that seemingly pits women against one another instead of emphasizing sisterhood and collectivity. Focusing more on the problems with the media narrative itself, Jessica Valenti (2016) pointed out that working through disagreements within the feminist movement can be healthy and productive, but that productivity is problematic when it takes places in "a media landscape that's allergic to nuance" and oversimplifies "complicated feminist discord." Instead of exploring a nuanced moment of contention within the feminist movement – the contention that is central to the processes of platform feminism – the catfight narrative allowed journalists and voices on both sides to personalize the argument, turning it into a battle between old and young feminists, between the establishment and the new

guard. This rendered Clinton's campaign highly overdetermined, placing upon her candidacy a difference of opinion within the feminist movement that extends and has implications far beyond her candidacy. However, by personifying this disagreement amongst feminists and placing that burden on the Clinton campaign, the media's catfight narrative drew on ageism and rendered the conflict more simplistic and political, deepening divides within the already fractious Left.

The Persona is Political: Examining Steinem's Celebrity Feminism

On February 5, 2016, Gloria Steinem appeared on *Real Time with Bill Maher* to promote her new book, *My Life on the Road*. After talking briefly about the book, a reflection on her time spent traveling and its impact on her understanding of feminist activism, Maher turned the conversation to young women's relationship to feminism. He asked Steinem if she agreed with Debbie Wasserman-Schultz, former chairperson of the Democratic National Committee, that young women have grown complacent about abortion rights. Steinem disagreed, saying, "I find young women very, very activist" and "way more feminist" than the women of her generation, saying, "We were, like, 12 crazy ladies in the beginning, and now it's the majority." She went on to emphasize that "gratitude never radicalized anybody," saying that, just as she did, young women are rightly motivated toward feminism by their anger at their situations rather than out of a sense of duty to feminists who came before them. Maher then pointed out that these young women, feminist as they may be, "really don't like Hillary Clinton" and were overwhelmingly supporting Bernie Sanders. In response, Steinem said that "women get more radical as we get older," contrasting this to younger women who are "thinking: 'Where are the boys? The boys are with Bernie.'"

Image 13: Gloria Steinem appears on Bill Maher's HBO talk show on 5 February 2016

There is much to unpack in this short exchange, which speaks to a contradictory view of cross-generational feminism and political choice. Maher opens the conversation with Wasserman-Schultz's comments, setting Steinem up to comment on a presumably antagonistic relationship between older and younger feminists. Wasserman-Schultz's comments echo common critiques of third wave feminism by arguing that younger feminists take for granted the gains of the feminist movement and no longer feel the need to mobilize for women's rights. However, Steinem disagrees and flips this postfeminist argument on its head by arguing that feminist activism has not deteriorated but rather blossomed amongst young people. Emphasizing its growing acceptance among wider swaths of the younger population, Steinem points out the anger and determination of young feminists, whom she applauds for drawing on their own experiences for their activism. But then Steinem moves from speaking about historical, contextual differences between the feminism of her youth – made up of "twelve crazy ladies" in decades past – to today's iteration of feminism – full of young people who are "way more feminist" than those of Steinem's generation – to specifically discuss the age of the women who make up each generation. This shift in focus marks a shift in the tone and content of her remarks

137

as well as she complicates her statement with further intergenerational comparisons. She asserts that these young women, feminist as they may be, are not as radical as older feminists because Steinem argues that such radicalization comes with age as women lose social power. She further emphasizes young feminist's lack of radicalism by flippantly alleging that their political choice is influenced not by progressive political goals but by personal heterosexual desire. Confusingly undermining her prior praise of young feminists, this final quote was decontextualized and re-mediated across platforms and fostered a major backlash.

Because of her history as a colossal figurehead of popular feminism, her power as a celebrity feminist was a common feature of the discourse around her comments. While many critics acknowledged her history of service to the feminist movement, mass and social media's tendency toward the sensational soundbite meant that most focused on the offensiveness of this final remark, divorced from its context in the interview and amplified by Steinem's fame and currency as a spokeswoman for the feminist movement. In response to the outrage, Steinem posted an apology to her Facebook page for "missp[eaking]," saying that her comments had "been misinterpreted as implying young women aren't serious in their politics" and reiterating the other points she made about young feminists during the interview (Steinem 2016). However, this apology was poorly received across media and did little to mitigate the impact of her remarks. For example, the majority of those who commented on the post did not accept her apology; a top commenter called Steinem "one of [her] heroes" but rebuked her statement, particularly for "how much damage" it has done to the feminist movement (Steinem 2016). Steinem's status as a celebrity feminist, a hero of the feminist movement, gives her an authority that renders her words powerful, both to shape popular conceptions of feminism and to damage it.
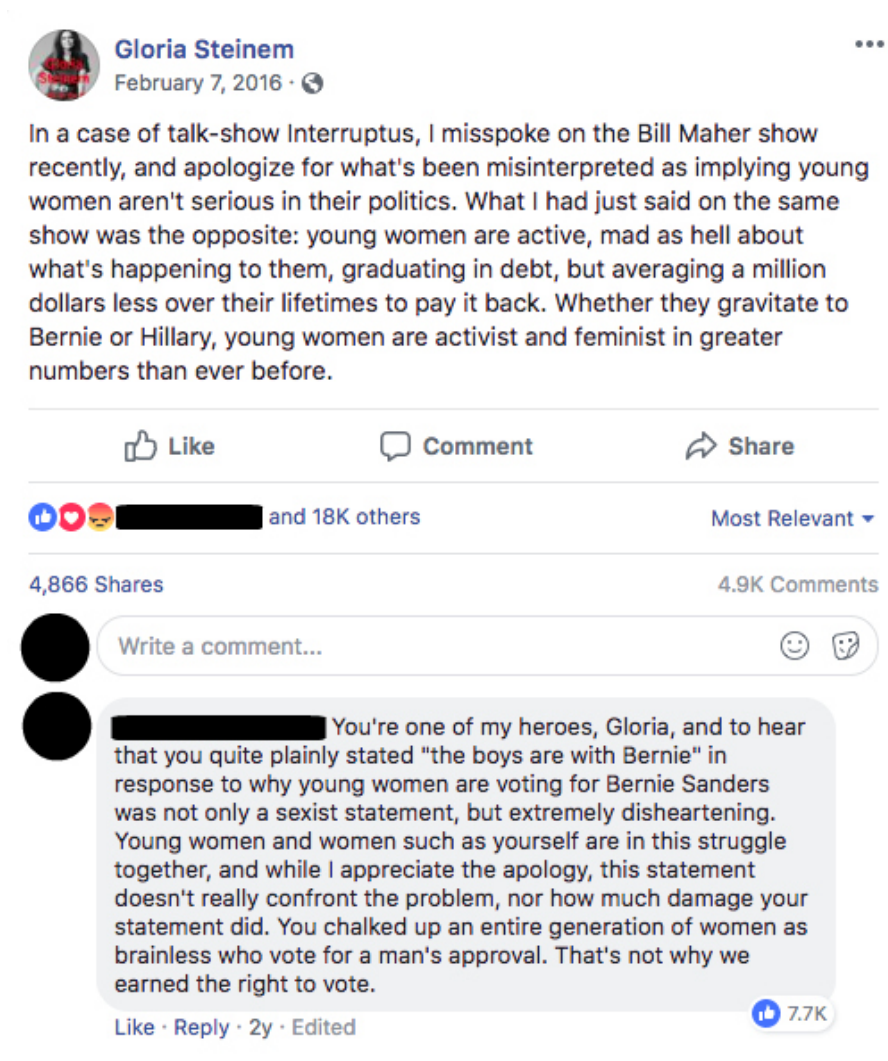
Image 14: Steinem posted an apology to Facebook on 7 February 2016, which provoked mixed responses from commenters

From the very beginning of the segment, Maher highlighted Steinem's status as a celebrity feminist, introducing her by saying, "I'm gonna call her a feminist activist 'cause she hates the word 'icon.'" This winking description reflects Steinem's goal to be known as an activist, a fighter for women's equality like so many other women, but Maher's characterization of her as a begrudging icon belies her unique position. Indeed, Steinem's history and prominence as a media figurehead for the second wave of feminism was the most common defining feature

of social and mass media discussion of her statements. Despite her apparent protestations against the label, Steinem's privileged status within the feminist movement vis-a-vis her iconicity and celebrity gives her words a special weight. One highly retweeted example echoed comments on Steinem's Facebook post, saying, "I have been lucky enough to speak to @GloriaSteinem and @madeleine in my life. Today I feel like feminism burnt down. I'm sick. Sad."[12] As Taylor (2017) explains, celebrity feminists are in a special position "to mediate what comes to constitute feminism in the popular imaginary," and few have done so in the United States more prominently than Steinem. By virtue of her celebrity, Steinem has been authorized to speak and speak for the feminist movement, and when her words rang dissonant with what young women framed as shifting modern conceptions of feminism, it created great tension. This tension is amplified by the features and temporality of platforms like Twitter, which afford rapid-fire, 140-character reactions that can foster quick and often highly emotional responses. Further, more inflammatory and/or emotionally intense responses can provoke more engagement from other members of the issue public, not only on social media platforms but also on blogs and other news and commentary sites across the platform ecosystem. That increased engagement can add both social capital and actual capital to the speaker/writer as well as the platform. Thus digital platforms' features, algorithms, and economic structures afford and reward highly reactive responses like the aforementioned tweet alleging that Steinem "burned down feminism." Some tried to combat this view of celebrity feminists' role within feminism; for example, feminist academic and writer, Roxane Gay (2016), tweeted, "I am tired but man. Feminism is not what prominent feminists say or do." Here, Gay tries to downplay the discursive power of figures like Steinem to speak for feminism, implicitly prioritizing the collective over the individual feminist.

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[12] To preserve anonymity, I have omitted Twitter handles here and throughout.

However, despite protestations from some like Gay, and because of the discursive power that figures like Steinem hold, it was clear across the discourse that this moment caused a reckoning amongst feminists that, within the popular imaginary, shook or even seemed to destroy some aspects of the movement.

Because of Steinem's overdetermined status within the realm of popular feminism, some discussions of her comments framed her metonymically as a stand-in for second wave feminism. For example, feminist firebrand and contrarian, Camille Paglia (2016), wrote an op-ed published by *Salon* analyzing Hillary Clinton's troubled presidential campaign that provides an overblown but analytically useful take on Steinem's comments. In this article, she rakes Steinem over the coals, calling her "the crafty dowager empress of feminism." In this ageist conceptualization, the feminist movement is not a network of activists but rather an empire presided over by aging figures like Steinem whose wealth and social prominence afford them great power. While this characterization is mean-spirited, hyperbolic, and intentionally provocative, it echoes themes that resonated across more measured critiques of Steinem's importance within feminism. Paglia continues, emphasizing the importance of this moment for laying bare the ways in which popular conceptions of second wave feminism are formed. She says that "never before has the general public, here or abroad, more clearly seen the arrogance and amoral manipulativeness of the power elite who hijacked and stunted second-wave feminism." Like others, although in more heightened and inflammatory terms, Paglia reifies Steinem's power as a celebrity to shape popular conceptions of feminism. While ignoring Steinem's radical feminist roots and her position as the anti-establishment counterpart to more reformist or "establishment" feminists like Betty Friedan when Steinem rose to fame during the 1970s, Paglia criticizes the role Steinem played in making feminism too "establishment" by favoring the reformist ideas of the

Democratic party. Like much of the discourse across the platform ecosystem, Paglia flattens the distinctions between Clinton and Steinem, totalizing second wave feminism and collapsing it with the modern Democratic party.

While this chapter does not seek to analyze and problematize Paglia's definition of feminism, what is key here is the notion that, because of her fame, Steinem was integral to shaping the feminist movement in ways that were influential to as well as influenced by the politics of the Democratic party. However, Sanders' supporters, emphasizing the intersectionality of today's popular feminism, criticized the "establishment" nature of second wave feminism (while ignoring the contributions of, for example, many women of color feminists during the second wave who lodged similar critiques) as well as certain segments of the Democratic party for their lack of radicalness. Now with this misstep, because Steinem represents that second wave, establishment feminism, she is further alienating young women from "her version" of the movement and, by proxy, Clinton's vision for the Democratic party. In many ways, both are being pushed out of popular feminism as it becomes increasingly suspicious of the establishment, a sentiment stoked and given voice by Sanders's campaign.

In her take on Steinem's comments and her status as an icon for *New York Magazine's The Cut*, Ann Friedman (2016) provided a different perspective on Steinem's value as a feminist figurehead and the positive aspects of a more organized, centralized, "establishment" feminism. Friedman explained that one benefit of second wave feminism was that it included "icons, like Steinem, who planned national summits and served as spokeswoman for the movement." While she acknowledges that feminists today continue to be active, organizing "some rallies and traditional campaigns," she points out that "there is no Big Feminism anymore, and no agreed-upon figureheads — at least no one to rival Steinem's fame and iconic status." While Friedman

142

does not necessarily champion the role of celebrity feminists like Steinem, she does argue that figureheads and the establishment-ness of earlier iterations of feminism gave the movement a coherence and an explicitly political, collective drive that is missing today. She argues that feminism now is "more about personal identity," functioning as "a belief system that we adhere to individually, and in highly individualized ways." Here, Friedman implies that the multifaceted, less consistent, more individually focused feminism of today prioritizes belief, identity, and personal choice over coherent collective action.

However, critics of Steinem and second wave feminism more broadly pointed out that that coherence often silenced or marginalized non-white, non-middle class, non-heterosexual, non-cisgendered women. While that coherence allowed for a more legible collectivity, the problem with that collectivity as lead by Steinem was that popular understandings of the movement often reflected women like Steinem herself – pretty, white, heterosexual, and middle class enough to make the general public pay attention to even radical feminist ideas. In contrast, feminist members of this issue public understand themselves as deeply intersectional and, while many make it clear that they are indebted to the feminists like Steinem who came before them, are critical of the overwhelmingly white and heterosexist bent of earlier feminism. This focus on intersectionality and the importance of multiple axes of oppression has moved Steinem's critics to see their version of feminism as more complex and radical, motivating individual choices with the good of an intersectional collective in mind. This tension over individual vs. collective political choices is at the heart of the intergenerational tensions Steinem's comments brought to the surface and pushes back against critiques of "choice feminism" that plagued the third wave.

I'll Be a Postfeminist in the Post-Patriarchy: Steinem and the Problem of Choice

Steinem's comments and the controversy they inspired map onto critiques of the individualistic, apolitical bent of third wave feminism in ways that are complex, contradictory, and surprising considering previous research on the ways the news media frames feminism. Some key criticisms of third wave feminism centered on its prioritization of individual choice over collective action and its refusal to police the borders of feminism; all actions could be considered feminist as long as women made the choice "freely," without taking into consideration the (white supremacist patriarchal) cultural forces that helped to shape that decision. This focus on individual choice is also a quintessential aspect of critiques of postfeminism and neoliberal ideology, where choices that are counter to many feminist goals – such as a prioritization of romantic love, pleasurable interaction with the industrial beauty complex, etc. – are reinscribed as a sign that the goals of feminism have been achieved. Now, the postfeminist logic contends, women have the right to choose to be anything they want to be, those choices are beyond reproach. These dynamics and the importance placed on individual choice have hampered the feminist movement. Our supposedly postfeminist culture takes for granted the movement's gains while repudiating the movement itself, and the third wave is hamstrung by a lack of political potency and coherence, just as Friedman pointed out in the article analyzed above.

Ruminations on individual choice and its relationship to feminism were a major theme in discussions of Steinem's comments, particularly in longer articles that afforded writers the space to analyze the controversy at greater length. Some of the discourse echoed the tenets of postfeminist critique; for example, in her article for *The Washington Post*, Kathleen Parker (2016) argued that feminists like Steinem helped to usher in their own undoing. She explained,

144

"Through their temerity and hard work, they've created a world in which their original purposes have become obsolete through acceptance," emphasizing that young women take for granted a "go-girl power" view of the world and cannot imagine the battles women like Steinem fought for their rights. She continues, saying that young feminists "really can have it all, including the choice to not vote for a woman just because she's a woman, because, after all, this would be sexist." However, this critique not only ignores Steinem's own statements about young feminists during her interview with Maher but was also contradicted explicitly and vehemently by the majority of responses to Steinem's comments. Parker's arguments demonstrate that postfeminist readings of platform feminism, while they may explain the dynamics at work for some young feminists, are insufficiently complex to deal with the shape the feminist movement is taking today.

Image 15: This Twitter user asserts reasons she is voting for Sanders using the hashtag, #NotHereForBoys

In many of the responses to Steinem's comments, critics ignored Steinem's acknowledgment that young women are angry and activist, focusing solely on her comments about young women supporting Sanders because that is "where the boys are" and criticizing the postfeminist notion that young women's choices are lead by personal desire rather than feminist political goals. This was particularly evident on Twitter, where many tweets lashing out at Steinem included the hashtag, #NotHereForBoys. As discussed in more detail earlier in this chapter, this tendency on both social and mass media to favor provocative soundbites that garner attention at the expense of nuance and complexity yielded many arguments that unknowingly agreed with Steinem but soundly criticized her. One particularly angry example comes from *The Huffington Post*. Author Rebecca Massey (2016) explains, "Plenty of terrible things still happen to women and girls, for no other reason than that they (we!) are women and girls. Do our elders really think we young women are so coddled or so dim that we don't see this?" She goes on to claim that it's a "disaster" for the feminist movement that older heroines like Steinem "fail to acknowledge younger women as rational beings" who make choices based on logical thought rather than heterosexual desire. Massey's response simultaneously miscategorizes Steinem's position by focusing on the fraction of her comments that received the most media attention while pushing back on postfeminist critiques that present young women as self-absorbed and unaware of the need for feminist activism. Her criticism addresses the incident as it was reported and discursively circulated – as an offensive soundbite – rather than in its original context, thus framing Steinem's comments as a postfeminist critique of young women's politics. This tendency to focus on offensive soundbites feeds into the intergenerational catfight narrative, pitting younger and older feminists against one another by emphasizing the discontinuities within the movement rather than the points of connection. Thus, even thinkpieces like Massey's that

146

helpfully push back on the postfeminist narratives about young women's choices that are out of step with platform feminism often serve to deepen and reify overblown divisions.

A focus on intersectionality, many members of this issue public said, is what drove their choice for Sanders rather than Clinton, not a desire for male attention. The most shared articles on Twitter both took Steinem and, by extension, Clinton to task for their lack of intersectionality and thus their fundamental misunderstanding of "today's" feminism. Sarah Grey's (2016) "Open Letter to Gloria Steinem on Intersectional Feminism" was one of the most frequently retweeted articles about Steinem's comments and centered on her problematically middle class white presentation of feminism. Grey writes to Steinem, "the movement you made, as amazing as it was, had some serious flaws when it comes to intersectionality," arguing "that fighting for gender equality alone, without also standing shoulder to shoulder on issues of race, class, and other kinds of oppression, isn't enough – in fact, it's not necessarily even progressive." Here, Grey emphasizes both Steinem's power within the movement – a movement she "made" – but also the problems with second wave feminism. The final aside, that non-intersectional feminism is "not necessarily even progressive," gets at the heart of the dominant critique of Steinem, Clinton, and Albright. While grateful to the "amazing" work these women and other second wave feminists have done, critics again flattened the second wave and emphasized that its focus on white, heterosexual, cisgendered, middle class women disenfranchised many women and does not mesh with current ideas of what is radical and progressive. Steinem's continued lack of intersectionality was also called out in another highly tweeted article. Teresa Jusino (2016) adds a critique of the transmisogyny and cissexism in Steinem's interview. After Steinem's comments about young female Sanders supporters, Maher made a transmisogynistic joke at celebrity Caitlyn Jenner's expense, to which Steinem lightly chuckled and shrugged. For Jusino, this is

further proof that Steinem and, by extension, Clinton represent a non-intersectional, outdated version of feminism that has no place in platform feminism.

Caroline Modarressy-Tehrani (2016) sums up this criticism in her piece for *The Huffington Post:* "What Clinton — and millennial feminist naysayers — should learn from this moment is the modern feminist movement is not beholden to a singular leadership; that the diversity of today's inclusive feminism is predicated on intersectional strength, and a power from listening to our battles today, not just attempting to frame the fight in battles of the past." Such a recommendation emphasizes divides within feminism rather than continuities and frames the feminism of Sanders supporters and other young feminists as modern and intersectional, moving forward rather than falling into regressive, sexist, postfeminist patterns of action and critique. This framing sets up a contrast between an "establishment" coherence of the second wave, lead by "singular" celebrity feminists like Steinem, and a diverse, intersectional collective of the "modern feminist movement." Again emphasizing the divisions between generations of the movement, this article reflects a tendency within the discourse to privilege a teleological progress narrative; "modern feminism" has progressed, focusing on current "battles" as a diverse collective that takes into account multiple axes of oppression, whereas second wave feminists are stuck in the past, insufficiently intersectional, and beholden to individual leaders. As Henry (2004) argued in her analysis of the tensions between the generations of feminism, platform feminism is delineated as much by what it is not – supposedly regressive, non-intersectional second wave feminism – as what it is – modern, diverse, and inclusive.

Overall, the central conflict set up in the discourse around Steinem's comments was the notion of choice – what heuristic should a feminist use to choose a political candidate? How does that heuristic change with age? And how much should iconic figures within the movement

influence that choice? Steinem implied that Clinton was the logical choice for the radical feminist activist, which young women would grow to be but were not yet because women get more radical as they get older. However, drawing on third wave ideals of individual choice, critics decried this statement as decidedly sexist and anti-feminist. Emphasizing that second wave feminists like Steinem fought for young women's right to make individual choices, criticisms simultaneously acknowledged Steinem's contributions while rebuking her statement. This complicated stance toward feminist history and neoliberal ideals of individual choice demonstrates that many of these young feminists do not take for granted the gains of feminism. Instead they framed themselves as crafting their individual political choices with the collective good – and indeed the feminist collective good – in mind. With a focus on intersectionality and inclusivity, many younger feminists argued that they are more radical than their second wave predecessors, with many arguing that Sanders would best achieve feminist goals that would benefit all women. Overall, it was this collective – the younger, "more radical" feminists – who were authorized to speak, whose voices were remediated, and whose views were amplified most prominently across the platform ecosystem, and while some defended Steinem and most applauded her history of fighting for women, Steinem lost her authority to speak for feminism. In the process, the media and many of Steinem's critics who spoke across platforms reified and essentialized the intergenerational catfight narrative of feminism, emphasizing the separation between the generations rather than the continuities.

Image 16: People for Bernie, a Sanders support account, asserts Sanders' feminist credentials in response to Steinem's comments

"A Vote for Gal Pals Everywhere": Madeleine Albright, Identity Politics, and the Symbolism of a Female President

The day after the Gloria Steinem debacle, Madeleine Albright, the former Secretary of State under Bill Clinton, spoke at a Hillary Clinton rally in Concord, New Hampshire. Speaking directly to young female voters, Albright said, "We [older women] can tell our story of how we climbed the ladder, and a lot of you younger women don't think you have to—it's been done. It's not done, and you have to help. Hillary Clinton will always be there for you. And, just remember, there's a special place in hell for women who don't help each other." Next to her on

the stage, Clinton laughed uproariously, and the crowd clapped and cheered in support. However, the response outside of the rally, across media platforms, was far less supportive and congratulatory. Particularly in proximity to Steinem's cross-generational comments the day before, Albright too became an "old guard," establishment foil for younger feminists, adding to the already fiery debate about how feminism intersects with age and political choice.

In addition to echoing postfeminist critiques of young women's ignorance about the continued need for feminist action that were discussed in the previous section, Albright's argument was based on notions of identity politics. While Albright has repeated this quip for years and, based on her smiling delivery and the hyperbolic tone of the statement meant it as a half-joke, her frustration with young female voters is clear from the quote's context within her speech. Although she emphasizes that Clinton is a champion for women who has worked to overcome sexism, this quote couches that endorsement squarely in the realm of sex. In her response to the media outcry, Albright admitted she made a mistake in her wording by inadvertently "tell[ing] a large number of women to go to hell," but stuck by her assertion "women have an obligation to help one another" (Albright 2016). She emphasized the importance of female politicians as both symbols of progress and sympathetic policymakers, contending that young women do not have the experience of older generations and may not grasp the importance of figures like Clinton. Near the end of her apology she stated that she welcomed intergenerational dialogue with young feminists. And while some voices did take her words as an opportunity to discuss generational differences within the feminist movement, overall her comments left room for outrage and criticism on both the Left and Right, allowing second wave feminism to become a backwards boogeyman for "modern" feminism to play against and serving as further justification for conservatives to disparage feminism and identity politics.

151

Central to feminist critiques of Albright's comments was a rejection of female solidarity as inherently feminist or progressive. Ignoring Albright's discussion of how Clinton would always be there to support women's rights, critics on Twitter framed her comments as "confus[ing] feminism w [sic] blind genital allegiance." Indeed, in an oft-quoted interview, actress Susan Sarandon[13] declared of a potential female President, "I want the right woman. There are great women that I admire that have headed nations…but I don't vote with my vagina, you know?" (BBC NewsNight 2016). This rejection of uncritical, female-body-based identity politics pervaded the discourse, and many of the most prominent sentiments expressed by frustrated feminists were given voice in Jessica Williams's segment on *The Daily Show* (2016) called "Breaking Down the Vagina Vote." When host Trevor Noah asked Williams about Sarandon's comment, she sarcastically exclaimed, "I mean, Trevor, what else am I gonna vote with? I *literally* vote with my vagina… I know that dudes can pee standing up, but big fucking deal, 'cause I can pull a lever with this bad bitch!" Through absurdity, Williams critiqued the idea that biological sex is central and, indeed, indispensible to women's political choice. She continued, saying that it is "diminishing" both "for women to accuse other women of supporting Hillary only because she's a woman" and "for women to tell other women they're obligated to vote for Hillary because, you know, we all have vaginas." This dual criticism emphasized the importance of individual choice; women should be able to use whatever heuristic they desire to choose a political candidate. For critics, Albright's apparent implication that a candidate's biological sex should function as the primary heuristic was offensive and patronizing. If many critics read Steinem's comments as accusing young women of prioritizing heterosexual desire

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[13] After Clinton won the Democratic nomination, Sarandon voted for Jill Stein in the 2016 presidential election. She has faced a great deal of criticism for her white privilege and overall shortsightedness following the election for implying that Hillary Clinton would have been as or even more "dangerous" a President than Trump (Brockes 2017).

over rational political choice, Albright's quip was criticized as encouraging young women to eschew that rational political choice in favor of female solidarity. In both cases, younger feminists asserted their desire to vote based on policy over personal desire or sex.

Image 17: Daily Show correspondent Jessica Williams pretends to be swiping for potential partners on Tinder during a Sanders campaign rally to satirize Steinem and Albright's comments

Conservative voices also criticized Albright's focus on identity, framing it as a prescriptive call for conformity that erases individual differences. For example, *New York Post* writer Michael Goodwin claimed that Steinem and Albright revealed the "dirty secret" of leftist identity politics, demonstrating their "willingness to use brass knuckles to achieve conformity" and supposed belief that "biology trumps individuality, and those who don't agree are traitors to their gender" (Goodwin 2016). He hyperbolically frames Albright's quip as a sexist directive that "ghettoizes" female voters by using "gender as a partisan club" that is only accessible through a leftist worldview and gender solidarity; to do otherwise is not only traitorous but loses women access to femaleness. This notion – of politicians on the Left somehow denying access to the category of "woman" for those who do not share their political views – was echoed by

153

Republican candidate Carly Fiorina. In an interview with Greta Van Susteren on Fox News's *On The Record* (2016), Fiorina claimed "liberal women have long said that unless you agree with them, you don't count. Unless you're liberal and agree with their orthodoxy, then somehow we don't count as women." These comments extend far beyond Albright's call for female solidarity, interpreting that solidarity as an exclusive, partisan club that has the power to decide who counts as a woman. By twisting and exaggerating her statements, voices on the Right like Goodwin and Fiorina used Albright's gaffe to deepen partisan divides along gender lines, ignoring how progressive and conservative policies differentially impact women and instead focusing solely on sex. Overall, Albright's comments opened a space for both Democratic and Republican naysayers to critique identity politics, oversimplifying her words to argue that she and Clinton were prioritizing sex over policy issues, emphasizing the gap between feminist generations as well as between the Right and Left.

Extending criticism of Albright's apparent focus on biological sex over policy as the appropriate influence of political choice, feminists also grappled with the importance of Clinton's presidency as a symbol. In that same rally in New Hampshire, Albright implied that Sanders, despite his more progressive policy initiatives, was not as radical as Clinton, saying, "People are talking about revolution. What kind of a revolution would it be to have the first woman president of the United States?" The revolution here would stem from the symbolism of having a woman in the highest office in the United States, and this argument became a key point of contention between female voters on the Left. Writing for *The New York Times,* Gail Collins (2016) explained that "the idea of a woman as president is a very important marker" for older women in particular who experienced egregious and explicit barriers to success because of their sex. This idea is echoed in a more personal way in an article in *The Guardian* wherein author

154

Lauren Gambino interviewed dozens of Democratic female voters ahead of the New Hampshire primary. One of those women was Linn Duvall Harwell, a 92-year-old "declared feminist" and "longtime Clinton supporter" who told Gambino, "'this is the century for women', and the pinnacle of that would be a female president." She continued, saying that Clinton's victory "'would mean everything.'" The representational power that a female president would convey was portrayed as simultaneously a stand-in and a harbinger of increased equality for women. Because a woman has gained access to the most powerful position in American politics, that achievement would symbolize the gains that women have made, even though her exceptional positionality does not necessarily reflect larger gains in equality that extend across women of all ages, races, ethnicities, sexualities, etc. However, female politicians do more than symbolize increased equality; citizens also hope that they will support policy decisions that will support women's rights (Van Zoonen 2006).

While many women agreed that it would be important to see a woman in the White House, voters expressed ambivalence about whether or not Clinton's symbolic victory would be followed up by progressive actions that would help all women. Another voter quoted in Gambino's article, a volunteer for the Sanders campaign named Elizabeth Ropp, expressed the overwhelmingly dominant opinion in the discourse among Clinton's non-supporters: "I hope that we do elect a woman to be president, but I want it to be the right woman. I want it to be the right person first and foremost." Often, Sanders supporters acknowledged the symbolic weight of a female president but prioritized Sanders' more progressive policy decisions over that symbolism; actress Emily Ratajkowski (2016) conveyed this prioritization succinctly at a rally for Sanders in New Hampshire, saying, "I want my first female president to be more than a symbol. I want her to have politics that can revolutionize." Pushing back on Albright's implication that sex is

155

sufficiently revolutionary, women like Ropp and Ratajkowski emphasized that their choice is based on Sanders' radical politics that they see as more beneficial for women and thus more feminist. Just as critics of Steinem often ignored her comments praising young women's activism and pushed back on the notion that Clinton was the logical choice for the radical feminist activist who was not befuddled by heterosexual desire, Albright's also ignored her statements in favor of Clinton's history of pro-woman policy decisions by framing her statement as irrational identity politics. Albright's apparent prioritization of symbolism and solidarity over policy again allowed many critics and media outlets to pit second wave feminist ideals against supposedly more progressive, modern, intersectional feminism.

#NotAllWomen: Intersectionality, History, and Feminist Generation Gaps

Not only did many critics of both Albright and Clinton question the identity politics and symbolism of Clinton's campaign and candidacy; specifically in relation to this incident, they connected their choice to vote based on the contrast between Sanders' apparently progressive platform and what they viewed as Clinton and Albright's history of non-intersectional positions and policies rather than her sex. Often, that criticism implicitly or explicitly turned Albright's contention that women should support other women on its head by pointing out that she and Clinton have supported policies that help certain types of women while ignoring or even harming others. For example, *Daily Beast* writer Amy Zimmerman (2016) explained that Clinton should recognize that "all women don't owe her their loyalty, especially if she isn't the strongest candidate on the intersectional issues—police violence, mass incarceration, and Palestine, to name just a few—that have just as much bearing on their daily lives as their ovaries." By listing policies supported by Clinton that disproportionately disadvantage women of color across the

156

globe, Zimmerman emphasizes the whiteness of Clinton and Albright, questioning them as "real all[ies]" to "brown and black women [who] face a litany of concerns" that are not shared by women like these politicians. Such sentiments were echoed across social media as well by frustrated women of color, typified by remarks like this tweet: "Dear Madeleine Albright, Oh really? Sincerely, Black women." The implication that all women, including women of color who were harmed by Clinton's policies, had a duty to support her candidacy evinced for many a self-serving feminism often associated with white women.

Other writers further emphasized the white middle class-ness of Albright and Clinton's feminism, characterizing it as outdated because "the historical moment for educated, white, well-off women to claim a uniquely oppressed status solely on the basis of their gender has long since passed" (O'Donnell 2016). Emphasizing a narrative of feminist progress, detractors pointed out the importance of intersectionality to young feminists for whom Clinton and Albright's "message of tweaking the current system to open floodgates for more trickle down (which is how she sounds) is not change enough for all the other things we care about" (Nakashima 2016). For feminists who care deeply about intersecting categories of oppression, the liberal feminism espoused in messages of gender solidarity from politicians who do not seem to fully grasp the importance of race, gender, sexuality, and class as overlapping systems of oppression rang dangerously hollow and was rejected from their understanding and enactment of feminism's current iteration.

Further, while Albright's comments during the rally implied that young feminists who supported Sanders rather than Clinton did so because they were ignorant of history, the discourse amongst her detractors shows otherwise. As with Steinem, the majority of the discourse acknowledged and was grateful for the gains of previous waves of feminism, if only in a

157

superficial, perfunctory way. However, it was many Sanders supporters' specific knowledge of history - namely, Albright and Clinton's (and, to a lesser extent, Steinem's) history that turned them away from Clinton and rendered them highly critical of her and Albright. A large proportion of articles and tweets written by critics cited two key moments from the 1990s and 2000s in Clinton and Albright's histories as anti-feminist: their imperialistic tendencies and their attacks on then-president Bill Clinton's sexual harassment victims. One particularly clear and incisive example of this critique came from Sarah Lazare's (2016) *Salon* article titled, "Dear Madeleine Albright and Gloria Steinem: Feminism demands we reject America's deadly imperialism." Citing, as did many other articles and tweets, a 1996 interview with *60 Minutes* in which Albright said that the deaths of half a million children as a result of U.S. sanctions against Iraq were "worth it," Lazare declared that "Feminists should unequivocally declare that Clinton's policies of war and empire that kill, wound and traumatize women around the world are not compatible with feminism." Here Lazare emphasizes that intersectionality and transnationalism that are incompatible with what many critics cited as Clinton's capitalistic and imperialistic policies. On Twitter, users were even harsher, calling Albright a "remorseless butcher of Iraqi women and children" and turned her words around on her, asserting that her past actions mean that "if anyone knows about going to hell, it's her." Together, Albright and Clinton's political track record was marshaled as incompatible with modern definitions of feminism, and that history not only does not merit them unqualified feminist support but in fact bars them access to it.

In addition to this criticism of Albright and Clinton's global policies, another scandal drew ire from detractors: Albright, Clinton, and Steinem's defense of then-President Bill Clinton's sexual impropriety. Maureen Dowd (2016), a longtime critic of the Clintons, soundly

critiqued these decisions after Albright's comments, centering her blame on Bill Clinton but nonetheless faulting Albright, Clinton, and Steinem for their complicity. She argued that President Clinton "lied and hid behind the skirts of his wife and female cabinet members," citing both Albright's decision to "give cover" to him as well as an op-ed Steinem wrote in the *New York Times* defending him as "low point[s] in women's rights" (p SR.9). Critics framed these three women's defense of Bill Clinton as another decision that prioritized political power over female victims of that power. Again, turning her message of female solidarity back on her in order to point out perceived hypocrisy, critics on Twitter angrily chided that there was a special place in hell "for a man that Rapes Women & his wife who supported him." Because their detractors viewed Albright and Clinton's histories as at odds both with Albright's statement and intersectional feminist ideals, their past did not merit support but rather ire.

Drawing on the radical, intersectional discourse of platform feminism, critics derided these policy decisions as establishment, white, Western middle/upper class liberal feminism that ignores and even kills women and children outside of the United States and prioritizes maintaining political power over supporting victims; overall, feminism that does not acknowledge, include, or support more vulnerable women. Feminists who supported Sanders said these policies drove them away from Clinton, and most media discourse supported and amplified their critique of liberal feminist identity politics in favor of what they framed as intersectional policy decisions. While the media narratives still often framed the conflict as an intergenerational spat, the conflict was really around authenticity: which feminism is "real" feminism? Which policies does one have to support, or which policies can one not support, to be "truly," "authentically" feminist? Overall, the dominant discourse around this incident gave voice to younger feminists who were frustrated with celebrity feminists and politicians relying on what

159

they saw as outdated narratives and policies that prioritize power over feminist policies, echoing a similar anti-establishment wave on the Right that Trump rode to the White House.

Nasty Feminists?: Conclusions about Catfights, Outrage, and Feminist Discord

While multifaceted and complex, the discourse around this moment of conflict centered on two key factors that work to define what feminism means today: how feminist political decisions should be made, and what a progressive feminist political platform looks like. Although her full comments were much more nuanced and respectful, Steinem's words as circulated seemed to accuse young feminists of making political choices based on personal reasons, namely heterosexual desire, while Albright seemed to assert that young women should vote for Clinton as a show of female solidarity and support for the symbolic victory of a woman in the White House. These two modes of choosing – one based on individualistic desire or solidarity under the banner of identity politics – drew ire from mostly younger feminists, whose voices were affirmed and amplified across media platforms as they asserted their desire to make political decisions based on candidates' policy initiatives that they believed would most benefit all women. While they asserted the importance of making this choice individually, and for women to support and not attempt to coerce the individual decisions of feminists, the way they spoke about this individual choice does not map neatly onto postfeminist critiques of neoliberalism. Instead, this feminist politics of choice argues for a marriage between the individual and the collective through their political choices, either voting for Clinton or Sanders because they argued they would be the best candidate to serve the interests of all women, and typically not because of personal reasons.

The second source of conflict relates to and extends the first: what makes a radical feminist, and what should today's progressive feminist platform be? Steinem located radicalism in the wisdom that comes with age, arguing that women recognize as they get older their lack of power. Albright echoed this generational divide, accusing young women of ignorance about the continued importance of feminist action, and asserted that true radicalism and revolution comes from helping women gain positions of power. Discourse around these comments interpreted Steinem and Albright as saying young women who support Sanders do not, and perhaps cannot, understand or be radical feminists. However, feminist critics of Steinem and Albright, still amplified and overwhelmingly affirmed across media platforms, argued that truly progressive feminism stems from intersectionality and championing policies and politicians whose initiatives will benefit as many women as possible, not just those who are white, middle/upper class, heterosexual, cisgendered, and Western. In many cases, this positionality relied on teleological narratives of feminist progress that emphasized discontinuities amongst the generations rather than their consistencies.

Feminist thinkers like Munro (2013) have noted that a hallmark of the current iteration of feminism, what I am calling platform feminism, is the practice of "privilege-checking," or using digital platforms to "call out" instances of sexism, racism, homophobia, etc. Others have noted that this digital feminist practice of calling-out can helpfully shed light on and critique misogyny and racism (Nakamura 2015), rape culture (Sills et al 2016), and create a new feminist rhetoric and counterpublic (Lane 2015). However, when that feminist critique is levied on fellow feminists, particularly around issues of intersectionality by women of color feminists, past incidents have demonstrated that those who engage in such calling out of white feminist privilege can be labeled as "toxic" (Risam 2015). However, across the majority of the discourse,

161

Steinem and Albright were implicitly labeled as toxic, perpetuating an outdated feminist politics and disrespecting younger women, while those who called them out were framed as making rational decisions based on policies they deemed most intersectional. Through a combination of uninterrogated ageism, anti-establishment sentiment, the increasing prominence of platform feminist articulations of intersectionality as common sense in media discourse, and the overall unpopularity of Clinton as a political candidate, this case study demonstrates a shift in how feminism is articulated through digital platforms and represented in the news. As we saw in the previous chapter, the online discussions around such events, particularly the fervor they can provoke on platforms like Twitter, inform the discourses around the incident across platforms both digital and legacy. In contrast to prior work on the topic, and in particular because of the remediation of the online frustrations of young feminists who disagreed with Steinem and Albright's words, in this case the more radical and progressive feminist platform gained prominence over Steinem, Albright, and Clinton's supposedly more reformist platforms.

In his work on social movements' use of digital platforms, Castells (2015) writes that networked social movements often begin from a place of anger, working to turn "emotion into action" and "outrage into hope" for a better world (p 13, 3). Ironically, it is feminists' outraged correction of one of the most stringent critiques prior generations of feminists often lodged at younger feminists in the 1990s and 2000s – that third wave feminism lacks political efficacy because of its "anything goes" attitude – that resulted in the backlash and call-out of these mammoth second wave figures. In doing so, members of this issue public formed a feminist counterpublic that countered establishment feminism as represented and given voice by these celebrity feminists from the inside by calling out their lack of intersectionality and asserting the hope for a feminism that includes and supports all women. This feminist outrage and discord,

162

which could have been a productive intergenerational conversation about how feminist politics must change and develop over time, instead was framed in simplified and sensationalized terms and circulated across media platforms, landing squarely on Hillary Clinton's shoulders. It added to her campaign's already considerable overdetermination and contributed to the swell of discontent against her as a Presidential hopeful, deepening fissions not only within the feminist movement but also amongst Democrats.

However, as we will explore in the next chapter, the political climate around the 2016 election provided myriad opportunities for outrage and discord not only in places we might expect, like a Presidential primary, but in places that seem less obvious, like the casting decisions for a modern reboot of a 1980s action-comedy. This next case study, which explores the misogynistic, racist online harassment of *Ghostbusters* actress Leslie Jones, provides another example of the interplay between national politics, celebrity culture, and feminist engagement. And as we return to the themes of online harassment explored in chapter two, we will see what happens when that harassment takes on an explicitly political tone, and how platform feminist publics cohere and rally around a celebrity to engage in sociopolitical critique and mobilize for change.

Chapter Four

Platform Vulnerabilities: Harassment and Misogynoir in the Digital Attack on Leslie Jones

Introduction

This final chapter draws together the key dynamics discussed in the three previous chapters, exploring another instance of online harassment that mobilized networked publics around celebrity culture as a platform for feminist intervention. As I discussed in chapter three, The Representation Project's #AskHerMore red carpet campaign sought to critique sexist representations of women in media and agitate for change. And, from a certain perspective, 2015 seemed like a time when those representations were in fact shifting. In particular, female characters were taking over major action franchises that had previously been led by men. Charlize Theron starred as the enigmatic, powerful Furiosa in *Mad Max: Fury Road*, while Daisy Ridley took the helm of the second most profitable film franchise in the world with her role as Rey in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. Continuing this trend of casting women in roles previously held by men, in October 2015, director Paul Feig announced that he would be directing an all-female reboot of the 1984 action-comedy, *Ghostbusters*. Feig was no stranger to directing movies starring women. His previous films *Bridesmaids* (2011), *The Heat* (2013), and *Spy* (2015) had all featured women in the lead roles. However, this reboot came as the political tensions discussed in the previous chapter were coming to a head, and the combination of a female recasting, a beloved classic film targeted to young men, and a political climate fraught with issues of identity politics meant that the film touched a highly politicized nerve.

Thus from the moment Feig announced the film, male fans who resented its apparent feminist bent took to social media to attack the film and its castmembers. Leslie Jones, the only woman of color among the female leads, received the brunt of this harassment. Even before its release, *Ghostbusters* became an overdetermined discursive space in which its success or failure became inextricably linked to that of racism and misogyny. Following the film's premiere in July 2016, Milo Yiannopoulos, the (now former) editor of alt-right[14] news site, *Breitbart*, posted a review of the film that singled out Jones as "the worst of the lot," describing her as "spectacularly unappealing, even relative to the rest of the odious cast," especially for her "flat-as-a-pancake black stylings" (Yiannopoulos 2016). Yiannopoulos was already a central figure in the online tensions between geek masculinity and feminism after stoking the #Gamergate controversy two years before. His racist and sexist review added fuel to the already sizeable fire of fanboy hatred for the film, and many of them set their sights on Jones. Harassers, many of them members of the alt-right movement, flooded Jones's Twitter mentions with racist, sexist language and imagery, which Jones screenshotted and shared with her followers to expose the level of vitriol she was facing (Jones 2016a). Jones temporarily left Twitter, and the platform eventually banned Yiannopoulos. Then on August 24, 2016, in a move that many argue was an attempt to avenge Yiannopoulos, Jones's personal website was hacked and filled with photos of the gorilla, Harambe, her driver's license and passport, as well as explicit photographs stolen from her iCloud account.

This harassment and the discourses that circulated around it provide a provocative case study for better understanding how digital platforms, specifically Twitter, and celebrity culture

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[14] By using the term "alt-right" I do not intend to downplay the centrality of far right movements in U.S. politics by labeling them "alternative." Instead, I use this term because it was the label deployed most frequently in the discourse I analyzed.

become spaces for ideological battles over race, sexuality, and gender that, in turn, provides an opportunity for networked publics to further define and enact developing conceptions of feminism. This chapter examines the connections between platform vulnerabilities and the vulnerabilities of women of color, as well as the links between the alt-right's rise and the mainstreaming of explicitly racist, misogynistic behaviors. From this discourse analysis, three themes emerged as most salient. The first were messages of support for Jones alongside indictments of those who attacked her. The second was the need for increased governance on Twitter in order to protect users like Jones. The third theme drew connections between Jones's experiences as a woman of color and the political climate emerging around the rise of Donald Trump and the alt-right.

These themes serve as a bridge between the vulnerabilities of platforms and the vulnerabilities of women of color in digital spaces and beyond as publics mobilized to "patch" perceived lapses in security. In computing, security patches are executable files that are released in response to known weaknesses in a platform to mitigate a threat's ability to exploit that vulnerability. Similar to the way that software engineers use patches to correct security vulnerabilities, the supportive awareness campaigns and calls to action that publics launched online (which stemmed from Jones's own agency in making visible the harassment) attempted to discursively "patch" two perceived vulnerabilities – of Twitter as a platform and of Jones herself. Twitter lacks comprehensive methods to combat harassment, and Jones's race and gender render her particularly vulnerable to abuse. By condemning the harassers and expressing love for Jones while calling for systematic changes to prevent such harassment in the future, Jones and her supporters attempted to patch these vulnerabilities and mitigate the threat the attackers posed. However, in response to these "patches," members of the alt-right condemned both Twitter and

mainstream media for marginalizing their conservative voices. As with patches of digital software, an attempt to fix vulnerabilities can sometimes have detrimental effects to the platform's overall functioning. In this case, this discursive patch resulted in backlash from the alt-right. It fed into their performance of victimization, allowing them to flip the discourse and frame themselves as oppressed and disadvantaged.

In this chapter I begin with a timeline of the events that led up to the attack before presenting the three themes that emerged as most dominant in the discourse around Jones's harassment: messages of support, the need for intervention, and connections between identity politics and national politics. Within this analysis, I provide a critique of the marginalization of Black voices within the discourse as well as an analysis of the alt-right's harassment behaviors to provide context and depth to the three themes.

Murdering Men's Childhoods: A Timeline of *Ghostbusters* Hate

The controversy around the all-female reboot of *Ghostbusters* began when director Paul Feig first announced he would direct the film in late 2014. Many male fans of the original film were incensed at the idea of women taking on these iconic roles and found a target for their ire on March 3, 2016 when the first *Ghostbusters trailer* was posted online (Sony Pictures Entertainment 2016). Within days it had become one of the most disliked videos ever posted on YouTube, and the most disliked film trailer of all time. The vitriolic reaction on YouTube was part of a coordinated campaign of male fans of the original film who were determined to tear down the new film and its cast. Over the next few months leading up to the film's theatrical release, news continued to swirl around the hatred the movie was garnering before anyone had even seen it, and in June, Feig spoke about the backlash to *New York Magazine*. While he

acknowledged the positive response he initially received to the film's announcement, he explained that the joyous reactions quickly gave way to a second wave of hostility. He described male fans' responses, saying, "I didn't realize that for certain older guys, the original *Ghostbusters* is the equivalent of a tree house that has the no girls allowed sign on it… And I think they look at me as the guy who came up, took the sign, lit it on fire, and then painted the inside of the tree house pink" (Yuan 2016).

By this point, the buzz around the film almost solely revolved around the ire it raised from vocal, misogynistic anti-fans. Even before its release, *Ghostbusters* was a flashpoint, a discursive space where the type of virulent misogyny that many progressives, including Feig himself, do not often see emerged. Such overdetermination moved bloggers like Aimee Lutkin (2016) of *Jezebel* to plead of the film, "Please be good. Please, just be passably good." The success or failure of *Ghostbusters* had become inextricably linked to the success or failure of misogyny. The film was released on July 15, 2016 to middling-to-positive critical response (it stands at a 73% on Rotten Tomatoes and received a B+ on CinemaScore) but a lackluster box office that doomed hopes of a sequel. Three days after its release and following the initial swoop of critical response, *Breitbart* co-editor Milo Yiannopoulos (2016) posted a negative review of the film that helped to ignite a firestorm of abuse targeted at Jones.

TEENAGE BOYS WITH TITS: HERE'S MY PROBLEM WITH GHOSTBUSTERS

WHO YA GONNA CALL?

WEIGHTWATCHERS!

THE PATRIARCHY!

SEXISM!

MISOGYNY!

Image 18: This header image appeared at the beginning of Yiannopoulos' review

Yiannopoulos's review is highly self-reflexive, reveling in the film's status as an emblem of the fight between his "loyal readership" of ultra-conservatives on *Breitbart* and the "social justice warriors" with whom they have been "warring" since the film was first announced. Yiannopoulos describes and reifies the film's place in the culture war between feminists and those on the alt-right, belittling the stars of the film for their bodies and the content for its apparently progressive goals. His review blasts the film not only for its "vacuous and incoherent plot" but, more centrally, for "its style and politics." Although Jones had been dealing with Twitter abuse for years, the quantity and level of hatred skyrocketed following Yiannopoulos's review. As she often did, Jones retweeted some of the most heinous abuse, stating, "Exposing I hope y'all go after them like they going after me" (Jones 2016a). Many of the tweets compared her to the

169

gorilla Harambe or King Kong and evinced the racist nature of the abuse. On July 19, Jones took

a break from the platform, saying, "I leave Twitter tonight with tears and a very sad heart. All

this cause I did a movie. You can hate the movie but the shit I got today…wrong" (Jones 2016b).

Following the attention the incident received, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey reached out to Jones to

discuss harassment on the platform. Then on July 20, Yiannopoulos was banned for life; the next

day, Jones returned to Twitter.

Image 19: Jones worked to rally support on Twitter by posting images of the harassment she received

Then on August 24, Jones' personal website was hacked. Hackers posted personal

information, including images of her driver's license and passports, nude photos, and images of

Harambe, the gorilla that was killed at the Cincinnati Zoo after a young boy fell into his

enclosure. Mirroring the abuse Jones had suffered on Twitter over a month earlier, the hackers'

actions typified misogynoir, which Moya Bailey (2016) defines as the "co-constitutive, anti-

Black, and misogynistic racism directed at Black women, particularly in visual and digital

170

culture" (p. 2). Responses to the photos on Twitter, for example on a Drudge Report link about the hack, were full of horrific misogyny and racism. Users derided her appearance, calling the images "the least viewed nude photos ever" and soundly arguing that "nobody wants to see those" (Drudge Report 2016). One user posted an image of a gorilla alongside the caption, "Pics are about as bad as you can imagine." Such comments highlighted the virulent racism of the attack. Overall, the film, the Twitter abuse Jones suffered, and the hack were overdetermined, creating a discursive arena in which tensions around feminism, racism, technology, and national politics were refracted. The key themes which emerged within that discourse – messages of support, calls for intervention, and connections to identity and national politics – demonstrate the struggle not only over the purpose and meaning of Twitter but the values it, and the United States itself, should fight to uphold.

"The Good People of the Internet": Messages of Love and Support

The first, most dominant theme consisted of messages of support. These messages were primarily found on Twitter and articles that linked back to prominent tweets, compiling them into messages from "the good people of the Internet" who "love Leslie Jones" (Lapowsky 2016; e.g. Koerner 2016, McIntosh 2016). In the days following the hack, thousands of supporters tweeted and retweeted antagonism for her attackers alongside positive messages to and about Jones using the hashtags #LoveforLeslieJ and #StandWithLeslie. As is often the case with controversies or tragedies that receive widespread media coverage, many of the most prominent tweets were from celebrities with large followings. For example, *Ghostbusters* director Paul Feig emphasized Jones's value and expressed solidarity, tweeting, "Leslie Jones is one of the greatest people I know. Any personal attacks against her are attacks against us all. #LoveForLeslieJ

@Lesdoggg" (Feig 2016). Other stars, such as writer/director/actress Lena Dunham used the attack to drum up love for Jones and call for change, saying, "Let's turn our anger at trolls into love for Leslie Jones and into strategies to protect all the heroines who don't deserve this bullshit" (Dunham 2016). Both called for users to support Jones, soundly rejecting her attackers. Moreover, as was common in the online news discourse surrounding the celebrity nude photo hack, Feig, Dunham, and others thematically connected this incident to more widespread issues (Lawson 2017). Feig attempted to garner empathy by connecting a personal attack against Jones to a wider attack on humanity, while Dunham more specifically likened it to the abuse women suffer, particularly online. She also goes further to argue that this incident should be a springboard for strategies to prevent such attacks in the future.

In addition to entertainment celebrities and fans, politicians also voiced their support for Jones. Following the hack, then-presidential candidate Hillary Clinton tweeted Jones, declaring, "@Lesdoggg, no one deserves this—least of all someone who brings us so much joy. I'm with you. -H" (Clinton 2016). Like Feig and Dunham, Clinton hinted that this attack has implications beyond Jones's personal experiences, implicitly tying this attack to other instances of online harassment by declaring, "no one deserves this." Further, she ends by connecting her campaign slogan to Jones in order to express solidarity. More than simply offering support, the use of "I'm with you" discursively ties this conflict between Jones and members of the alt-right to the struggle between Clinton and Trump for the presidency. And while Clinton's tweet does not make that connection explicit, *Glamour* writer Maggie Mallon does. In this article relaying Clinton's support of Jones, she shows that Clinton spent the time around this tweet taking Trump to task for his rhetoric of racism and his failure to condemn his most hateful, white supremacist supporters (Mallon 2016). Mallon says, "This all begs the question: Has this year's election

172

cycle—and the selection of Trump as Republican candidate—emboldened people to be more outspokenly racist? And not only that, has it inspired them to take direct action to spread their message of hate? It should come as no shock that Yiannopoulos, the man who prompted the initial attack on Leslie Jones, is an ardent Trump supporter." Like Feig, Dunham, and the article from *Wired*, Mallon makes connections beyond Jones herself, showing that this event is embedded within larger systems of racism, misogyny, and the mainstreaming of alt-right politics. The vulnerabilities experienced by women of color extend outside of online spaces like Twitter or the iCloud, and the racism that has long structured power relations in the United States is being expanded, deepened, and made more explicit by the current political climate.

In addition to the prominence of this theme on Twitter, these messages of support and solidarity spread across platforms. The majority of the news articles about the incident focused on the support she received on social media, reprinting tweets from celebrity and non-celebrity fans alike. An article from *Wired*, titled "The Good People of the Internet Love Leslie Jones," is a typical example that embeds tweets from non-famous users, aggregating them and formatting the post as a letter to Leslie letting her know that "a whole lot of people think [she's] really talented," attractive, and inspirational (Lapowsky 2016). Further, the post is framed as a call to arms: "The Internet needs to spend the next days, weeks, and months grappling with how to deal with this darkness and trying to understand why it tends to descend upon women, especially women of color." Just as Feig and Dunham did with their tweets, *Wired* connects the abuse Jones suffered to more widespread issues of online abuse, specifically targeted toward women of color, and gestures toward the need for better strategies to combat such behavior.

In her first interview following the incident, Jones appeared on *The Late Show* with Seth Meyers (2016). The interview gave Jones an opportunity to speak about the attack directly and

personally, calling the abuse she suffered on Twitter "gross," "mean," and "unnecessary" and highlighting that, if she had not said anything, no one would have known about it. After both Jones and Meyers call for increased protections on Twitter, Meyers shows a video fans posted on YouTube in support of her, highlighting "the outpouring of affection" she received. While they both spend the segment emphasizing the injustice of the abuse and rallying for change, the interview leaves viewers with the message that fans overwhelmingly support Jones.

But within this deluge of support, several women of color pointed out that key voices were missing or muted: white women. Kimberly N. Foster (2016) declared that the Jones harassment is "an opportune time for white feminists to step up," calling out the racist history of the feminist movement. While she says "things might be a little bit different this time," tacitly acknowledging the presence of some white feminists speaking up for Jones, she says that she'd "like to see more." Others like Rachel Lord (2016) specifically called out Jones's white *Ghostbusters* co-stars Kristen Wiig, Melissa McCarthy, and Kate McKinnon for their failure to offer their support and condemn her attackers. The public silence of these women was surprising, and their failure to rally around Jones and acknowledge the inherent racism of her abuse was a source of frustration for women like Foster, who pointed out these failures as indicative of broader racial inequalities within (white) feminism.

However, when white women and men *did* show support, they were disproportionately praised and amplified across media platforms. The stars who got the most headlines for speaking out against Jones's harassers were Katy Perry, Dan Aykroyd, and Hillary Clinton. In a televised interview with *ET Canada* that was later posted online, Aykroyd praised Jones's talent as a writer and comedienne and called her harassers "insignificant gnats" who "have no lives of their own" ("Dan Aykroyd" 2016). He then hypothesized that her harassers were probably "active Klan

174

members or members of the Aryan nation" who will vote for Trump. It is understandable why

this clip was newsworthy. Aykroyd, as one of the original *Ghostbusters*, is one of the men many

of Jones's harassers were supposedly defending. His praise and support of Jones, coupled with

his evisceration of her attackers, thus has a particular weight and relevancy. Further, his language

is bombastic and tailor-made for click-bait headlines. However, the amount of press he got

dwarfs that of celebrities of color, whose support was often highlighted only on outlets that target

Black readers (e.g. Cross 2016; "Jay Pharoah" 2016). Indeed, mainstream media's privileging of

white voices was epitomized by *Variety*, who invited white actress and "feminist activist" Lena

Dunham (2016) to write a "tribute" to Jones in which she praised her for her resilience following

the harassment. Instead of asking a woman of color to write about Jones, *Variety* asked a woman

who, for many, typifies the problems with white feminism.

Image 20: Many Black men rallied to support Jones on Twitter using the hashtag
#BlackMenSupportLeslie

While white men and women may have gotten much of the credit for supporting Jones,

people of color also organized to rally around her but received considerably less mainstream

attention. For example, activist Blake Simmons started the hashtag #BlackMenSupportLeslie out

of a desire to "be there for [Jones] as a Black man to show support" (Davis 2016). Like other

supportive messages across platforms, many of the tweets went beyond supporting Jones to

connect her experiences to broader racialized, gendered, and political contexts. Many linked the

harassment of Jones to the experiences of Black women online more generally, expressing solidarity with her and "all other black women who get harassed on [Twitter] daily simply bc they exist" and "bear the brunt of the most vicious attacks."[15] Still others drew more explicit connections to racism, declaring support because Jones's "talent and courage is a threat to white supremacy." However, although this show of solidarity was present on Twitter alongside other hashtags like #StandWithLeslie and #LoveForLeslieJ, mainstream sources privileged those more general, not explicitly racial hashtags. In my sample, only media outlets targeted at Black audiences, such as *BET*, *Essence*, and *Hello Beautiful,* mentioned this hashtag (Diaz 2016; Davis 2016; Clark 2016). Overall, the currency that media outlets afford white voices, even when they speak on issues of racism, demonstrates continued systematic inequalities, even within discourse that seeks to call out and disrupt those inequalities. White people are rewarded for their progressive statements with media attention, while people of color are marginalized and often only spotlighted by media specifically for Black audiences. This serves to reinforce the power of white voices, circulating and re-circulating their words across a multitude of more mainstream outlets, while Black voices are relegated to "niche" outlets.

This outpouring of love and affirmation attempts to patch Jones' vulnerability as a woman of color. It was her blackness and femaleness that rendered her a target of racists and misogynists who flooded Twitter with abuse. While Twitter provides some methods for blocking or filtering harassment, the platform leaves users vulnerable to attack. In response to this vulnerability, supportive issue publics attempted to assuage the threats posed by attackers, drowning them out with kindness. This discursive patch was, in a way, effective – in the sample I analyzed, the vast majority of the discourse was supportive of Jones. Much like security patches

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[15] In order to preserve anonymity, I have omitted these users' Twitter handles.

work to mitigate the possibility of a threat exploiting a platform's weakness, the issue publics

around this event lessened the threat of harassers by overwhelming the discourse with love.

Further, many of these messages, such as those from Aykroyd, Clinton, and users of

#BlackMenSupportLeslie, were not simply supportive but gestured toward the need for

intervention, connecting this instance of racial and gender politics to national political

movements. This discourse indicated that the patch was not sufficient to correct systemic

inequalities or Twitter's potential as a space of harassment. Therefore, these messages are often

explicitly political, providing support in order to raise awareness and issue a call to action.

"Y'all Need to Get Some Security!": Calls for Intervention on Twitter and Beyond

In addition to support, a second theme that emerged was the need for intervention regarding

online hate on Twitter and beyond. As Jones mentioned in an interview with Seth Meyers, the

type of harassment she suffered is endemic on Twitter yet often hidden to the public; unless

someone looks at the mentions of a user who is being harassed, such abuse may not show up on

their stream (*Late Night* 2016). While this abuse is widely understood as part-and-parcel of life

on Twitter, particularly for women of color, the response from Twitter has been much hand-

wringing and apologizing followed by scant action (Oluo 2016). And not only did she suffer

attacks on Twitter, Jones's iCloud account and personal website were hacked. The abuse she

suffered on Twitter was not confined to that platform, and her vulnerability spread across the

online ecosystem. In response, advocates, fans, and fellow celebrities called for more action from

Twitter and beyond.

As Twitter was the epicenter of the original attack, and because of its history of failing to

adequately address abuse, most calls for change targeted that platform specifically. Twitter has

177

frequently found itself at the center of controversies surrounding such regulation and, despite some changes to their policies (typically due to high-profile controversies such as this one), users still have limited agency when it comes to reporting and combating abuse on the platform. Users have three options when it comes to taking action against those who target them: blocking, reporting, or setting up content filters. Blocking a user prevents that user from seeing your activity. Reporting a user alerts allows you to file a complaint to Twitter and, in some instances, the user will be deleted from the platform. Users can also set up content filters that hide tweets that include a set of user-determined key words. However, this fix only serves to hide offensive or abusive content for an individual user while the content remains on the platform; it is not about managing or controlling behavior but is simply about keeping it hidden. Filters function as bandages, covering up the sometimes toxic results of Twitter's openness, and leaving it up to users to protect themselves.

Much of the discourse framed Twitter's response to Jones's experiences as insufficient, likening it to "pour[ing] a cup of water on a dumpster fire" (Beres 2016). As *Vice* writer Sarah Emerson (2016) points out in an article about the harassment Jones faced and abuse on the platform more generally, Twitter's response has been lackluster despite recommendations from experts. Consistent with many online platforms, Twitter prides itself on an ethos of freedom of information and free speech, and CEO Jack Dorsey and his team have been loathe to add features that could be viewed as censorship. In a call to investors following the publicity around Jones's experiences, he tempered his promise to find solutions by saying, "We are not, and never will be, a platform that shows people only part of what's happening" (Spangler 2016). The result has been lots of talk and performative gestures but little substantive change. As Gillespie (2010) and Van Dijck (2016) have noted, this reliance on the language of neutrality serves to distance

platforms from their role in shaping public values as they attempt to absolve themselves from the toxicity their platforms often host and fail to moderate. Some analyses put the lie to Twitter's claims of neutrality, calling their relative inaction an example of "white obliviousness," which *The Root's* Maiyisha Kai defines as "an intentional lack of self-awareness subconsciously (or consciously) rooted in maintaining the status quo" (Kai 2016). Here, Kai draws connections between the features of the platform, such as its policies on moderation, and conservative ideologies. She, like the scholars mentioned above, point out that platforms are not neutral, and in fact their rhetoric of neutrality cloaks their complicity, conscious or not, with regressive values like white supremacy. As I will demonstrate in the next sections, this baseline of complicity becomes clear when Twitter *does* take action again racist, misogynistic harassers like Yiannopoulos, who then cry "oppression!" and declare Twitter a bastion of censorship.

A key reason this theme had such resonance was because Jones used her platform as a celebrity to argue for change. She continually made statements arguing for technological or legal intervention – patches to protect others who are vulnerable on the platform – in her appearances on late night talk shows (*Late Night with Seth Meyers* 2016), skits on *Saturday Night Live* (*Saturday Night Live* 2016), and her appearance at the Emmy Awards (Hope 2016). With regard to Twitter specifically, Jones addressed the issue during her interview with Seth Meyers. She explained of the platform, "It's like, that's my favorite restaurant. I love the food there. Three people just got shot in front of me. Y'all need to get some security!" Meyers agreed, saying, "they really need to try to start sorting out how to not just protect people like you but the people that don't have this public forum." This exchange highlights several key points. First, Jones emphasizes the violence of the abuse that takes place on the platform, likening the verbal and emotional harassment she suffered to gun violence. Rather than downplaying its importance, she

179

emphasizes the life-or-death harm such vulnerabilities can cause. Secondly, both she and Meyers point out that this abuse is not isolated to Jones herself but is endemic to the platform; indeed, Meyers nods to the fact that famous users who suffer abuse and garner a lot of press attention may get some intervention that "regular" users may not. Finally, both make it clear that Twitter should be responsible for self-governance and securing the safety of its users rather than leaving this task up to victims.

Image 21: Jones appears alongside fellow SNL castmember Pete Davidson in a parody of Mr. Robot that poked fun at the harassment she faced

However, Jones suffered harassment beyond the confines of Twitter when her iCloud account and personal website were hacked, and she addressed this crime as well and sardonically marshaled for assistance. For example, Jones, who is a regular castmember on *SNL*, addressed the incident for the first time on the 42nd season premiere of the sketch comedy show in a skit lampooning the Emmy-winning television show, *Mr. Robot* (*SNL* 2016). In the scene, Jones approaches Elliot, vigilante hacker and protagonist of *Mr. Robot,* asking him, "You gotta help me find out who hacked my pics! Who got all my little nasties!" This theme was repeated again

during her appearance at the 2016 Emmy Awards. As is customary during award shows, the accountants in charge of tabulating and protecting the voting ballots explained their procedures for doing so. They were interrupted by Jones, who came on stage and said, "Don't nobody wanna know about boring Emmy secrets. But since you good at keeping things safe, I got a job for you—my Twitter account! Put that in the vault, please! Y'all over here using your skills to protect Best Voiceover In a Sitcom. Meanwhile, I'm butt-naked on *CNN*!" While Jones makes light of the incident in these two appearances, the implication is clear: the attack bled outside of Twitter to her iCloud account and personal website and was circulated across other platforms like *CNN*. Even though Dorsey made some attempts to help her, the abuse was not confined to Twitter, and she was vulnerable and victimized across the web. While Twitter often bears the brunt of criticism around online harassment, in this instance, Jones's experience of multiple platforms across the online ecosystem was impacted by the abuse.

Moments like this often stir public discourse but yield little change. While calls for intervention may dominate discussions of online abuse, that prominence usually remains on the level of discourse. The patch provided by flooding the discourse with messages of love to mitigate the threat posed by racism and misogyny provides a temporary fix but does nothing to address deeper issues, online or in society more broadly. This tension – between highly publicized calls for progressive policies versus substantive reforms to address systemic inequality – lies at the center of the Jones attack.

Misogynoir and #MAGA: Connecting the Jones Attack to the Rise of Trump

The final and perhaps most provocative theme that emerged from the discourse surrounding Jones's harassment was the connection between the incident, identity politics, and national

politics. Beyond contextualizing the incident in systemic issues of racism and the misogyny, online think-pieces, newspaper editorials, magazine articles, and Twitter users forged linkages between rise of the alt-right and this instance of misogynoir. Beyond contextualizing the incident in systemic issues of racism and sexism, writers and social media users connected the abuse to the rise of the alt-right. Overall, discussions around this hack went beyond the discourse that surrounded similar events such as the massive celebrity nude photo hack in 2014 (Lawson 2017). While online news coverage of that hack connected the incident to broader issues of what Sarah Banet-Weiser (2015) calls "popular misogyny," the issue public that formed around the Leslie Jones harassment pushed a step further, connecting such issues of identity politics to actual political movements like the alt-right.

Some of the most prominent discussions of the Jones attack focused on its connection to racism and misogyny. The two most retweeted tweets came from musician Questlove and popstar Katy Perry. Questlove tweeted, "these acts against leslie jones….are sickening. Its racist & sexist. it's disgusting. this is hate crimes. this aint 'kids joshing round'" (Gomez 2016). He soundly rebuked the hack and abuse as a "hate crime," arguing that the attackers were motivated by racism and sexism. Pushing back against those who minimized the attack as a juvenile joke, he claims its seriousness and its interconnection to racial and sexual categories of difference. Jones was the victim of a hate crime, rendered vulnerable to attack because she was Black and a woman, and this fact is "sickening."

Image 22: Katy Perry's tweet was the most recirculated media object related the harassment against Jones

Perry, at the time the most followed person on Twitter, had the most retweeted and widely circulated tweet about Jones, saying, "Do not give your eyeballs to this racist, hate-filled, misogynoir crime. I #StandWithLeslie [heart emoji]" (Perry 2016). She directed her followers not to look at the nude images of Jones, and like Questlove explicitly called out the criminality of the attack. However, while Questlove pinpointed racism and sexism as the cause of the attack, Perry highlighted the intersectionality of those categories with the term "misogynoir." By invoking a term that had circulated amongst feminist academics and activists, Perry added nuance to her critique and brought the word more mainstream acknowledgment; as Caitlin Gibson (2016) notes in her commentary on the tweet, Google searches of the term skyrocketed. There is much room to criticize Perry's performance of allyship. She has a history of engaging in cultural appropriation, and the fact that a term coined by a Black feminist scholar, Moya Bailey, attained prominence only after it was used by a white woman who did not credit her again demonstrates the inequalities propagated by the overrepresentation of white voices in the media. Perry's shortcomings notwithstanding, the dominance of this particular tweet demonstrates the more complex focus on intersectionality that characterized much of the conversation.

The nuanced tone of the discourse and its analysis of misogynoir surfaced elsewhere in mainstream media. A notable example is an article that appeared on *Teen Vogue's* website. In the

183

article, Rachel Charlene Lewis (2016) emphasizes the importance of viewing this attack not only as sexist but racist, saying, "Leslie is not being targeted because she's a woman. She's being targeted because she's a black woman, a dark-skinned black woman more specifically, and when we strip this issue of its specifics, we broaden out the issue in a way that makes it harder to target." Speaking back to the non-intersectional, watered-down definitions of feminism common in popular culture, Lewis argues for specificity and intersectionality in our analysis of the Jones incident. In contrast to prior iterations of popular feminism, Lewis, Gibson, and Perry's emphasis on Jones's harassment not simply as a woman but as a black woman demonstrates a level of intersectionality that, in this instance, spread from academic and activist discourse to Twitter and beyond. This example of, as Yiannopoulos called it, "third-wave Twitter-style" feminism was picked up by many mainstream outlets discussing the harassment and was largely presented as the commonsense response; as mentioned earlier, in this way, the security patch was highly effective.

However, the discussion around the attack went beyond connections with intersectional identities to connect it directly to the rise of the alt-right. For example, a Twitter user, in a highly retweeted comment, makes this connection, saying, "Leslie Jones harassment started on Breitbart. Breitbart is running Trump's campaign. Don't forget to fucking vote." Here he links then-editor Yiannopoulos to Trump campaign manager Steve Bannon, who was one of the founders of *Breitbart*. Implying that the explicit racism and misogyny of *Breitbart* would be central to a Donald Trump presidency, this user engages with this highly public incident to show the potentially dire consequences Trump's election could bring. NARAL Pro-Choice America president Ilyse Hogue concurred with that connection, stating, "If u think harassment of @Lesdoggg & rise of @realDonaldTrump r coincidental, u aren't paying attn." (2016).

184

Beyond Twitter, the connections also emerged in news commentary, such as a piece by J. Hoberman (2016) in *The New York Times*. In his article about the links between Hollywood films and national politics, he calls the harassment against Jones "a populist protest against the presumed power of minorities and women echoing that voiced by some irate Donald J. Trump supporters, particularly online." Underscoring again the film's status as an emblem of the fight between feminists and anti-feminists, Hoberman provides a critique of the backlash while connecting the abuse thematically to Trump and his supporters. Other writers, such as Aja Romano (2016) from *Vox*, also provided incisive analyses that used Jones's experiences to help explain what she describes as the "escalating culture war" of "politicized violence" that the alt-right is waging online, arguing that the timing of the attack on Jones "is indicative of the alt-right's increasing coalescence as a movement, and its increasing willingness to adopt the language and deploy the measures of extremism." For Romano, the attack on Jones demonstrated a further development of the tactics used during #Gamergate, which she points to as a moment when these strategies of harassment first gained mainstream notice. The connections between the rise of Trump and the alt-right and Jones's abuse extend beyond the campaign's inclusion of *Breitbart* employees; the rhetoric used by Trump and his supporters mirrors that of those who harassed and hacked Jones. Across the web, members of this issue public foregrounded the interconnectedness of systemic misogynoir and the rise of the alt-right to this incident, embedding it not only within systems of sexism and racism but also highlighting how prominent and explicit those systems are increasingly becoming as leaders like Trump and movements like the alt-right come to power.

"Bitchy Little Tweets": Yiannopoulos, The Alt-Right, and Online Harassment

As Sarah Banet-Weiser (2015) argues, popular misogyny, or the mainstreaming of overtly sexist behaviors, has risen in tandem with and as a backlash against an increase in popular feminism over the last several years. In an interview with *Salon* about Jones's experiences, Andi Zeisler, feminist writer and cofounder of *Bitch Media*, analyzed these dynamics and their relevance to this incident. Zeisler argues that the controversy around the *Ghostbusters* reboot and the racist, misogynistic online harassment of Jones was the result of a "perceptual fallacy" (Marcotte 2016). She contends that, since feminism seems to have won, men like Yiannopoulos are able to present themselves as the David to feminism's Goliath. This false perception has contributed to an "underdog" mentality and an ethos of white male victimhood that leads some men to lash out. While Zeisler's arguments are astute, she does not explore how this perceptual fallacy arises. At this historical juncture, popular representations of women and feminism garner a great deal of attention from the press and online communities, which makes them loom large in our cultural conversations. As this analysis shows, themes consistent with popular feminism, such as messages of support, critiques of structural misogyny and racism, and critiques of alt-right politics, dominated mainstream media coverage of Jones's experiences. This means there were plenty of examples that Yiannopoulos and others could point to in support of their feelings of marginalization and victimization. From their perspective, their perception is not fallacy; it is not women of color like Jones but rather their own whiteness and masculinity that is rendered vulnerable within the current media landscape.

This adversarial, victimized mentality is maintained by a complicated and contradictory attitude toward structural and discursive inequalities. For example, while Yiannopoulos was confronted by CNNMoney's Alison Kosik with a tweet in which he called the castmembers of

the *Ghostbusters* fat and ugly, he stated that "mainstream" discourses of body positivity and fat acceptance have "started to marginalize traditional beauty standards," explaining that he was coming from a place of "compassion" and concern for the health of women (Alcantara 2016). When Kosik asked him how his abusive tweet was compassionate, he brushed it off, shrugging and saying, "This is a bitchy little tweet. Who cares?" This example typifies the way in which this perceptual fallacy functions. Yiannopoulous mistakes discursive power (the increasing presence of body positivity in mainstream media conversations) for structural change. In this case, discourse supersedes structural inequalities. However, when confronted with his own language, he disavows the importance of it, writing it off as a "bitchy little tweet" unworthy of outrage. Indeed, in the same interview he goes on to critique those who take trolling too seriously and simultaneously maintains its importance, saying, "So long as there are people who think that 'offense-taking' and, ya know, 'having grievances' is equivalent to some genuine kind of injury, I'm still necessary... So long as there is a politics in this country, as there is, where people can turn victimhood and grievances into a currency, I will continue to be as offensive as possible."

His trolling is both important and unimportant; it is simultaneously crucial to undermining dominant discourses of political correctness and popular feminism while also trivial compared to "genuine," presumably corporeal and/or material damage. However, this perspective ignores the connection between these "genuine" injuries and the structural inequalities that often give rise to them. Overall, Yiannopoulos, the alt-right, and indeed the Trump administration selectively choose the relative importance of discourses and structural inequalities. They deploy the importance of discourse when it maintains their perceptual fallacy and underdog mentality (Yiannopoulos's anger at body positivity and the increasing prominence of popular feminism in mainstream discourses; Trump's outrage at "fake news") but disavow it when it points to

187

structural inequalities, in this case, between men and women (Yiannopoulos's "bitchy little tweet" or Trump's pussy-grabbing "locker room talk").

Image 23: Milo Yiannopoulos and InfoWars host Alex Jones

Further, Yiannopoulos and others on the alt-right draw connections between both the intersectional feminist ideals they fight and the "free speech" they champion to struggles over Twitter's identity as a platform, particularly in relation to the Jones harassment. The day after Yiannopoulos was banned from Twitter, he appeared on *InfoWars*, an ultraconservative radio show hosted by temperamental conspiracy theorist and hatemonger, Alex Jones. After news of the ban broke, *InfoWars* published an article on their site reporting on and condemning Twitter, which they argue "has developed a reputation for draconian, onesided and often-unexplained suspensions of conservative users" while "demonstrate[ing] an unashamed bias towards progressive causes" (Thalen 2016). Here we see a reversal of the discourse that dominated in mainstream and social media around Jones' attack; whereas Jones and others were calling for more "security" and safety for users, those on the alt-right chastised the platform for engaging what they see as highly partisan over-policing of conservative voices. The platform vulnerability

the alt-right tries to address is not its openness but rather its selective and, from their perspective, biased tamping down of conservative voices.

Just as he did by posting his review on *Breitbart*, Yiannopoulos chose another extremist alt-right platform, *InfoWars*, to share "his side" of the story. These moves bolster a sense of outsider-ness and work to ensure a friendly audience who will agree with Yiannopoulos. This agreement stands in contrast to platforms he and Jones view as hostile to alt-right ideas like Twitter. During the interview, he further underscored the view that Twitter is a haven of progressive ideals, describing the *Ghostbusters* film he maligned as a film "conceived out of spite" that "hates men," describing it as full of "third-wave Twitter-style feminist jabs" (MILO 2016). First, his assumption that the film "hates men" draws on stereotypes of feminists as angry man-haters that has long held great representational and discursive power in mainstream media. However, part of what Yiannopoulos is lamenting here is the loss of power that representation holds now in mainstream media such as Hollywood blockbuster films, citing "Twitter-style feminism" as partially to blame. Linking the discourse of this film to that on the social media platform of Twitter, he makes an argument that the media ecosystem is being infiltrated by the supposedly-progressive ideals of those voices that are afforded the most power and protection on Twitter. He and Alex Jones then move on to discuss his banishment from the platform. Alex Jones argues that "we [ultra-conservatives] are the people who make Twitter and Facebook big," and he and Yiannopoulos go on to claim that they're the "only interesting thing" on Twitter because the rest is full of social justice warriors who constantly critique what they see as bigotry. And about his banning, he claims that Twitter has turned him into a "free speech martyr" by silencing him, ultimately making him stronger while the platform itself becomes weaker in the eyes of his supporters.

There is much to pick apart within this interview, but what emerges as most notable is the ways in which the discourse on the far right is almost the exact opposite, a distorted "fun-house" mirror, of the popular feminist discourse that dominated social and mainstream media discussions of Leslie Jones (Banet-Weiser 2016). Whereas the mainstream discourse attempted to patch Jones's vulnerability, constructing her as one of many victims of Twitter abuse that spread across platforms, those on the right viewed Twitter as a historically biased platform that disenfranchises conservative voices by over-policing them while ignoring those progressive voices they see as equally inflammatory. These interviews give insight into the alt-right's view of both feminism and racism, and Twitter's place within that ideological space.

Conclusion

While other instances of online harassment have filtered into and accumulated within the public consciousness, including the celebrity nude photo hack discussed in chapter one, the hatred toward Jones surfaced at a cultural and political tipping point. The controversy it engendered spoke to larger political divides within the United States, which amplified its resonance far beyond the confines of celebrity culture. Although these shifts in the American political landscape are ongoing, this case study allows us to better understand the dynamics at play and the significance of digital media and celebrity at this cultural moment. The epicenter of the attack was Twitter, and the themes that resonated strongly there filtered across the platform ecosystem. In response to Jones's agency in refusing silence and making visible the harassment she was facing, the issue publics rallied around her, attempting to discursively patch her vulnerability as a woman of color and the vulnerability of Twitter as a platform by offering messages of love and support. In this way, these supportive publics used the incident to, as

Papacharissi (2014) argues, "feel" their way into politics. However, despite the support that

circulated across media platforms, mainstream outlets overemphasized white voices and

deemphasized Black voices, demonstrating that racism still impedes the apparently increasing

intersectionality of media discourse. The support Jones received across media outlets also

highlighted the need to go beyond discursive patches that serve only to combat harassment by

drowning it out, and many called for increased governance of harassment on Twitter and

embedded the attack on Jones within intersectional, systemic inequalities. The discourse also

connected the attack to national political shifts, providing logistical and analytical connections

between this incident and the ascendance of far right politics. But the incident also sparked

outrage among conservatives who viewed the *Ghostbusters* film and the banning of

Yiannopoulous from Twitter as indicative of both a platform-level and cultural bias against

"traditional" values and voices on the right, feeding into an underdog, outsider rhetoric that

ultimately helped rally support for alt-right ideals and, a few months later, a Donald Trump

presidency.

   As José van Dijck has argued, we are living in a "platform society" (2016). Digital

platforms such as Twitter, the iCloud, and personal websites infiltrate nearly every facet of our

social, economic, and interpersonal lives and have a great impact on public values. This struggle

over Twitter's values – whether the platform should "patch" its vulnerabilities and take measures

to protect users from harassment or allow total freedom of speech – reflect struggles over larger

social and political issues surrounding systemic inequality. Further, the discursive security

vulnerabilities of platforms like Twitter, the iCloud and Jones's personal website both evince and

feed into the vulnerabilities of women of color like Jones. Alt-right harassers exploited such

vulnerabilities and traded on the ethos of free speech to attack, defending what they see as

increasingly vulnerable values of masculinity and conservative politics. However, their fight is against power structures that are discursive rather than structural; white men are still far more powerful than women of color, and conservative politicians now control all three branches of the United States government. Overall, the dominance of progressive, intersectional values in the discourse that circulated across online media platforms provided ample evidence for the alt-right's sense of victimhood, further stoking backlash against popular feminism and feeding into the same feelings of white male disenfranchisement that helped bolster Trump's far right political platform.

Consistent with analyses from prior chapters, the discourse around the attack on Leslie Jones extended beyond her idiosyncratic experience, framing this attack as emblematic of broader, systemic inequalities. Just as online news and commentary about the celebrity nude photo hack emphasized that many women, not just those who are famous, experience similar types of digital sexual harassment, the networked publics who rallied around Jones connected her experiences to that of other women of color. Further, the increased focus on the importance of intersectionality evident in discourse around Albright and Steinem's comments was central to conversations around Jones as well. While discussions of race were invisible in discourses around the nude photo hack and often overshadowed by defenses of Arquette's white feminism, we can see from these two case studies that discussions of intersectionality were integral and in fact dominant in 2016. However, mainstream discourse still privileged white voices and white-led hashtag campaigns over those of people of color, demonstrating a continued investment in preserving whiteness within platform feminism.

Because this was a time of such contentious politics, the connections between pop culture and national politics were more prominent and explicit in the discourse. Whereas discussions of

the nude photo hack drew connections to systemic misogyny, this discourse went beyond these broader social structures to draw connections to specific political parties. This was because the publics that participated in the attack were more easily identifiable as a political faction; because the platform on which this event began was an explicitly alt-right site (*Breitbart*) it was easier to make the connection. This gave the bifurcation and unequivocal damning of online communities, similar to that which we saw in the nude photo hack, an explicitly political target that allowed members of this discursive public to make not only broader statements about social inequalities but to connect those social inequalities to the platforms of particular political parties. Perhaps what we are seeing here in developing understandings and enactments of platform feminism is an increasingly politically-minded popular feminism as the lines between entertainment, celebrity and politics are becoming so obviously blurrier. With a reality television star then-candidate and now-President who engages in most of his communications with the public via Twitter, the dynamics of proximity and intimacy that structure both theorizations of celebrity culture and celebrity's use of social media are amplified; from this perspective, it is not surprising that celebrity is the platform on which these negotiations of feminism are playing out because other sociopolitical negotiations are, too, on multiple levels and on multiple scales. While this phenomenon does not begin with Trump – discussions of charisma have drawn together theorizations of both politicians and celebrities for decades – the bombastic, digitally-mediated, hyper-publicity-driven nature of his presidency has amplified the connections between the worlds of celebrity and of politics and demonstrates the centrality of digital platforms within that amplification.

Conclusion

On March 1, 2018, several members of the Time's Up initiative – director Ava DuVernay, showrunner Shonda Rhimes, actresses Laura Dern and Tessa Thompson, Bad Robot CEO Katie McGrath, and attorney Tina Tchen – met with members of the press to give a 60-day progress report on their work. These women explained that the legal defense fund had raised an astounding $21 million and connected 1,250 people who called their hotline for support with lawyers via the National Women's Law Center (Kaufman 2018). In addition to this legal work, Time's Up was also partnering with StoryCorps to give women an opportunity to tell their stories of harassment, to be housed in the Library of Congress. However, many of the reporters had more Hollywood-focused questions. Namely, the Academy Awards were only a few days away, and red carpet mainstay Ryan Seacrest had recently been accused of sexual harassment by his former stylist (Holloway 2018). With the huge showing the initiative had made on the Golden Globes red carpet with the blackout nearly two months before, reporters asked: Would they make a similar red carpet statement at the Oscars? Would members of Time's Up agree to speak to Seacrest? DuVernay shook her head, saying, "God, I'd hate for this whole thing to become a soundbite about Ryan Seacrest, I really would," before stating that Time's Up did not have an official position and it would be up to individual members to make that decision (Kaufman 2018).

Rhimes pushed back harder on the question, focusing not on the particular issue of Seacrest but rather the priorities the question evinced. She said, "It's really important that you know that Time's Up is not about the red carpet. And those women you saw on the red carpet

representing Time's Up [at the Globes] are now off the red carpet working their butts off being activists." The women were concerned that a big, splashy showing at another awards show "might feel satisfying" but that they were "not sure how much it's translating" into substantive action, according to McGrath. Instead, they want to be "strategic and thoughtful and authentic" in how they roll out the movement. Rhimes added, "We're also well aware of how much attention people are able to command at certain times. It feels like some of these amazing women have a superpower. And we like to deploy that superpower usefully in an intelligent way and not just because we can."

However, Time's Up is no feminist utopia, and it has certainly not been without its issues and its detractors. A few days after this press conference, *The Hollywood Reporter* published an insider-y piece that articulated concerns with the movement from anonymous members, including several that *THR* said are "central" and "important" (Masters 2018). These concerns include the meteoric rise of the movement and its lack of structure or leadership. While it was initially conceived as a leaderless collective, some members said it was becoming increasingly clear that an organization of this size and with this much money is in serious need of management. Other concerns included what one anonymous executive referred to as "feature film, actress, movie star cliquey"-ness and an air of exclusivity, with certain members invited to meetings while others who wanted to be involved, especially executives and non-celebrities, could not get a foot in the door. Additionally, some were suspicious about its roots within the Creative Artist Agency, especially in light of the role CAA talent agents had played in funneling actresses to Harvey Weinstein.[16]

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[16] Reese Witherspoon, who started the conversations that led to Time's Up over email amongst her friends in Hollywood, is married to Jim Toth, a talent agent with CAA. According to an article about Weinstein's "complicity machine" published in the *New York Times* in December,

Image 24: This picture was posted to the official Time's Up Instagram on 9 February 2018 and shows members Jill Soloway, Rashida Jones, Tina Tchen, Melina Matsoukas, Nina Shaw, Ava DuVernay, Maha Dakhil Jackson, and Natalie Portman at the Makers Women Conference.

The previous chapters have mapped the sociocultural landscape that preceded the #MeToo and Time's Up moments, exploring how digital platforms facilitated the shifts occurring within the overlap between celebrity culture and feminism. That nexus has grown in both size and complexity since 2014, as the features of both celebrity and feminism have filtered in and out of this discursive space, accumulated, and become amplified both by the affordances of digital platforms and the platform of celebrities' fame. #MeToo and Time's Up were both ignited by widescale recognition of the sexual vulnerability of celebrity women, similar to the dynamics that sprang up around the nude photo hack. Fellow survivors flooded social media platforms with their own experiences, working to patch the feelings of trauma, isolation, and

at least eight CAA agents knew about Weinstein's behavior and continued to send clients to him for decades (Twohey et al 2017). This report was published right around the time Time's Up held its inaugural meeting.

196

guilt that often come with sexual assault while demonstrating the magnitude of the problem like Jones's supporters flooded social media with goodwill towards her in an attempt to drown out the negativity.

As more stories came out in Hollywood and beyond, celebrity women banded together in an act of red carpet activism that resonated with #AskHerMore, working to shift the focus from their clothing to their cause by wearing all black to promote the newly-formed Time's Up. However, these women followed this performative gesture with the creation of a legal defense fund that not only aims to help women who have been sexually harassed get legal assistance but, like Arquette, is working to support workplace equality more broadly. Unlike celebrities like Steinem who achieved fame for her feminist activism, entertainment celebrities are spearheading this new feminist institution and working to use the "superpower" of their fame to amplify issues that affect all women. And from their mission statement to the information listed on their website to the women chosen to speak at this press conference, it is clear that Time's Up is aiming to engage in this activist work intersectionally, focusing on the ways in which race, class, sexuality, ability, religion, and ethnicity mean that women experience sexual harassment and workplace inequality differently. However, concerns that have long been part and parcel of the feminist movement, especially as it has intersected with celebrity, are myriad within Time's Up: namely that it is exclusionary and full of privileged women, and that its focus is much more on incorporating feminism into a celebrity brand than creating a functioning organization that can engage in activism. Worse is the fear that, at its core, it is part of a deflecting tactic used to shield the perpetrators of the very crimes it purports to fight. Like so many of the incidents discussed in the previous chapters, Time's Up is a slippery jumble of feminist activism, capitalism, and celebrity that is at once hopeful, frustrating, promising, and confusing.

197

By engaging in close readings of a wide swath of the media discourse surrounding multiple celebrity events and controversies that centered on issues of gender, race, sexuality, and feminism, my goal has been to understand the processes that undergird negotiations of these topics on digital platforms. Based on my analyses, I argue that these processes indicate a shift to platform feminism. Platform feminism describes the ways in which the affordances of digital platforms are transforming the ways in which publics can navigate and engage with the ideas and discourses of feminism. The easy flow across platforms and the amplification of particular media objects enabled by features such as retweeting, embedding, and hyperlinking afford publics the ability not only to consume multiple and often contradictory articulations of feminism but also to use various platforms to articulate their own feminist discourses. Further, I argue that celebrity culture is a particularly important site at which to examine these discourses because not all platforms are created equal, and the attention afforded to celebrities via the figurative platform of their fame necessarily amplifies their views. As we saw in chapter two with Patricia Arquette and chapter three with Gloria Steinem and Madeleine Albright, that privileged position can backfire and subject celebrities who "misspeak" feminism to often-intense digital outrage. However, many of the digital platforms on which these negotiations take place thrive on controversy, scandal, and intense emotions, so these missteps can occasionally have the inadvertent affect of amplifying important feminist issues, such as wage equality or intersectionality, even more as a host of voices throughout these issue publics speak back. These collections of voices, which filter through social media, mainstream legacy media like newspapers and magazines, online news and commentary sites, and television, amplify one another by using the affordances of digital platforms as well as through the accumulative force of their numbers.

As we work to grapple with the complexity and messiness of this current moment of feminism's popularity, particularly as refracted through celebrity culture, a concept like "platform feminism" can give provide the flexibility necessary to engage in such analysis. The polysemy of the term "platform" – as a sociopolitical platform, a figurative platform, a digital platform – can help to highlight the different facets of popular feminism today. Throughout the preceding chapters we have seen how digital platforms have helped to transform the ways in which celebrity and feminist discourses filter into one another and accumulate, and the ways in which the affordances of digital platforms and celebrities' fame amplify those discourses. But those processes of filtration, accumulation, and amplification are open-ended and can help to elucidate the dynamics of many more phenomena than the ones analyzed here.

This analytical framework is situated within and expands the sub-fields of platform studies, feminist media studies, and cultural studies. It begins from the notion, drawn from platform studies, that platforms are technological infrastructures that are deeply embedded within a culture. Far from being neutral, their design and affordances are based on sociocultural assumptions, and they intimately shape the ways in which users interact with them. On platforms designed for sociality, this means that the types of engagement between users are shaped, though not determined, by these features. Moreover, platforms are not isolated from one another but form an ecosystem. This project, then, adds to our understanding of platforms by exploring, in a granular way, how different platforms afford different modes of interacting with other users and with content, which shapes the ways in which publics negotiate issues around feminism. And, most importantly, I demonstrate that it is the ease with which content can flow across platforms that affords the possibility of a nuanced engagement with feminism, providing the opportunity for publics to experience feminism as a space of contention and debate rather than a simplistic

ideology. However, this flow can also render users, and particularly women, vulnerable to abuse. These affordances are open-ended rather than teleological and can thus provide opportunities for a range of outcomes, including platform feminism, platformed racism (Matamoros-Fernandez 2017), networked misogyny (Banet-Weiser and Miltner 2016), etc.

In asserting such an argument, this project pushes back on one of the original intentions of platform studies as a subfield. Platforms studies' originators, such as Montfort and Bogost (2009), envisioned platform studies as an alternative to studies of media and technology that emphasized issues of politics, culture, and identity. Instead, platform studies could be a space where hardware and software were isolated from broader ideological contexts and analyzed as historical and material objects. However, such a position can reify notions of platforms' neutrality and, in ignoring the importance of sociopolitical factors, preserve the idea that technologies are separable from the ideological positions of those actors and contexts that create them. In contrast the concept of platform feminism asserts the importance of understanding how technology, identity, and politics are intertwined and inform one another.

Further, by using these insights from platform studies, this project also adds to prior work on feminist media studies. Popular culture has been central to shaping conceptions of feminism for decades, and this project argues that digital platforms are now crucial to the shifts we are seeing in the way and degree to which feminism is a part of mainstream discourses. Far from repudiated, feminism is now trendy and marketable, particularly in digital spaces. However, I argue that the marketability of feminism and its articulation through capitalistic phenomena like celebrity culture should not foreclose scholars from taking it seriously and exploring its activist potential. The concept of platform feminism seeks to expand beyond reductive analyses of feminism in popular culture that often end with the same conclusion, regardless of the object of

study or the method: capitalism undercuts any potential for substantive activism within the popular, and regardless of the inroads feminism is making within popular culture, the effect is more or less that of postfeminism. By incorporating insights from platform studies to feminist media studies, this project pushes back against this conclusion to argue for a more open-ended and flexible conceptual framework for understanding this moment of popular feminism.

This open-ended, flexible, digitally-focused articulation of feminist theory and praxis echoes in some ways the work of cyberfeminists in the 1990s and early 2000s. Influenced by Donna Haraway's (1985) "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," artists, activists, and theorists from across the globe (e.g. VNS Matrix 1991, Patterson 1992, Plant 1997) sought, in varied and often contradictory ways, to makes sense of the nexus of gender, sexuality, embodiment, and technology. In the process, many cyberfeminists expressed ambivalence toward the feminist movement, conceptualizing cyberfeminism as an alternative, customizable, boundary-less perspective that lacked what some criticized as the overly-rigid boundary policing of feminism (Daniels 2009). The analyses in the preceding chapters and, indeed, the concept of platform feminism share a similar interest in rethinking and remaking the boundaries of feminism by exploring what happens at the intersections of technology and gendered/raced/sexed/classed bodies and identities. However, the networked publics that emerged around the incidents I studied evinced a different orientation toward boundaries than did cyberfeminists. Through the practices of supporting and critiquing various articulations of feminism or anti-femininism, these issue publics worked to define what should or should not be included within the platform of feminism. Moving forward with this project, I will engage more expansively and deeply with these contradictions, drawing from cyberfeminist work to shed new light on my findings and to

further think through the implications of a platform studies approach that simultaneously centers politics and identity.

Finally, this project emphasizes the importance of incorporating an analysis of politics and technology into studies of celebrity. Particularly in the last 30 years, celebrity culture has been transforming rapidly, from the rising and now dimming influence of celebrity magazines to the migration of celebrity news online to the seemingly more "authentic" and direct platforms for audience interaction afforded to celebrities by social media (Sternheimer 2011, boyd & Marwick 2011). This translation of celebrity from analog to digital spaces has coincided with an increase in the publicity around celebrities' involvement in social and political issues. While some studies have analyzed celebrity and politics (Van Zoonen 2006) or celebrity and social media (e.g. Marwick 2013), few have studied all three together. The intersection of these three fields is especially crucial at this historical juncture, and this work encourages celebrity scholars to think about their intersecting implications on the role and power of celebrity in society.

Final Thoughts and Future Directions

The flexibility afforded by the concept of platform feminism is crucial in order to fairly and accurately analyze post-Weinstein popular feminism, particularly that which is articulated through phenomena like #MeToo and Time's Up. As the opening anecdote for this conclusion demonstrated, Time's Up is a complicated amalgam of feminist institution, celebrity branding strategy, and media phenomenon. It recalls the more institutionalized feminism represented by second wave organizations like NOW but with an entertainment celebrity twist. Its stated goals, initiatives, marketing strategies as evidenced by the members chosen to be its public faces, and social media presence work to decenter straight middle class white women and foreground

202

women of color, LGBTQ women, and economically disadvantaged women. However, concerns abound, from its supposedly exclusionary, fame-focused membership structure to its intimate ties to the Hollywood machine that long enabled harassment to flourish. Further, media coverage of the movement tends to focus on the more gossip-y aspects of Time's Up, with journalists more keen to get soundbites about Ryan Seacrest than the progress of the legal defense fund. And the backlash against it and other articulations of feminism within popular culture is often severe as popular misogyny (Banet-Weiser 2015) continues to rear its head. My future work will grapple with these contradictions and work to make sense of the dynamics around this movement as refracted through its mediation.

Moving forward, I will interrogate more deeply the relationship between liberal feminism and platform feminism. While certain liberal feminist goals and strategies, such as workplace equality and a push for litigation against sexual harassers, are gaining prominence during this shift to platform feminism, liberal feminism also often functions as a foil for many feminists who wish to move beyond reform to a more radical, intersectional feminism. These voices are especially prominent on platforms like Twitter, and my future work will aim to better understand how platform feminism and liberal feminism come together and diverge. Deeper engagement with cyberfeminist work will aid in this goal. Additionally, a common thread throughout the previous chapters is the practice of calling out. As I continue to expand this project, one of my main goals is to theorize the practice of calling out with more nuance and further explore the role it plays within platform feminism. In particular, I will also consider the practice of "calling in" rather than "calling out," which refers to the work of critiquing "people who we want to be in community with, people who we have reason to trust or with whom we have common ground" (Trần 2013). Trần (2013) calls this a "less disposable way of holding each other accountable,"

and will be a particularly fruitful concept for discussing the ways in which feminists work to

negotiate with one another.

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205

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