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**Chick Clicks and Politics:
An Exploration of Third Wave Feminist Ezines on the Internet**

by

Janina Chandler

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment
of the degree of
Master of Arts in Communication
School of Journalism and Communication

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

May, 2002

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**Chick Clicks and Politics:
An Exploration of Third Wave Feminist Ezines on the Internet**

submitted by Janina Chandler, B.A.

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

Thesis Supervisor

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I explore a particular genre of women-centered ezines – amateur publications that are produced by and for women and published on the Internet. Three distinct bodies of literature serve to guide my exploration. Work regarding Third Wave feminism, the potential of the Internet as a progressive medium of communication, and the nature of zines have all been useful to this project. Each of these bodies of literature highlights various themes that I then proceed to illustrate using textual examples drawn from a sample of the ezines. Specifically, this genre of ezines is shown to manifest characteristics of Third Wave feminism, including Girlie Culture, and the negotiation of difference and contradiction, to the extent that they are ‘Third Wave ezines’. They are also shown to take advantage of the unique capability of the Internet for many-to-many communication for the purpose of political engagement in the interest of feminisms and the formation of feminist virtual communities.

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This project is dedicated to my dad, who always wanted to know more about everything and provided me with an excellent role model of perseverance and dedication.

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INTRODUCTION

www.cuntzilla

www.bust

www.disgruntledhousewife

www.bitch

www.wench

www.girlbomb

These websites can be sexy or crude: they might have pink leopard print backsplashes, and showcase images of half-naked women, but they are not Internet porn sites – far from it in fact. They are published by and for women, and exhibit characteristics associated with what has come to be known as feminism's Third Wave. As such, they are examples of a particular genre of women-centered electronic zines, or ezines (pronounced eezeens), and serve as a basis for probing the intersection of gender and new technology.

While initially I thought it would be an interesting and informative exercise to take stock of all that was online for women, I quickly realized that this was a near impossible task considering the sheer number of websites currently targeted at women. Even by narrowing my focus to non-commercial, women-centered websites, or those published by and for women, I was still faced with an overwhelming number of websites. I concluded that my research topic needed further narrowing. Over the course of my preliminary research, a particular type of women-centered website captured my interest. They stood out distinctly, as bold, brash, clever and sassy. Additionally, many of the

names of these same sites appeared repeatedly in the recent feminist literature I reviewed on women and the Internet. Most often, they were included in discussions of what was referred to as a Third Wave of feminism, that used the term 'ezine' to describe this type of website. Yet, the relation between this particular brand of feminism and the use of the Internet was not entirely clear. Despite their relatively high visibility, I was hard pressed to locate any literature that explored these women-centered ezines in any depth. Here was a gap I could fill. I decided to conduct an in-depth exploration of Third Wave feminist, women-centered ezines. In order to develop an understanding of this particular genre of women-centered ezines, my goal was to identify the recurring themes that ran through them, in terms of content and in terms of the manner in which they made use of the Internet as a medium of communication. My research addresses the following key questions in pursuit of this goal. What are the specific characteristics of Third Wave feminism? To what extent and in what manner are these characteristics manifested in these women-centered ezines? What advantages does the Internet provide as a medium for communication? To what extent and in what manner are these advantages being exploited by these women-centered ezines? What is the nature of the ezine or its predecessor, the zine?

Before laying out the literature that underpins this project, I thought it necessary that the reader be made aware of the historical relationship between women and computer technology, and more specifically, the Internet. The historical overview in Chapter One relates a brief history of women's involvement with computer technology and the Internet, with respect to its development, and as users of this technology. Women have traditionally been, and continue to be, under-represented in the field of computer science.

However, their use of computer technology began early on and their presence on the Internet has risen dramatically, despite its early domination by male users. An overview of the manner in which feminist research has approached women's relationship to computer technology and the Internet is also explored in this chapter. This provides the reader with an understanding of where this research project fits into the greater body of feminist literature concerning the intersection of computer technology and gender. The majority of feminist research in this area has revolved around the challenges and barriers women face in their involvement with computer technology and the Internet. My own research was driven by the notion that, although such research is necessary and valuable, the rate at which women are taking to the Internet indicates that there might indeed be something positive going on there. In a relatively short span of time women went from being very poorly represented as users of the Internet in the early to mid 1990s, to representing almost half of the user population at the end of the decade.

In order to guide my exploration of Third Wave feminist ezines I examined different bodies of literature. Work regarding Third Wave feminism, the potential of the Internet as a progressive medium of communication, and the nature of zines have all been useful to this project. Chapter Two presents these three areas, which inform the actual analysis undertaken of ezines. The first section of the chapter identifies the emergence and characteristics of Third Wave feminism. This most recent addition to the "oceanography of feminism", as it is referred to by Deborah Siegel (1997:52), combines a sense of building on the accomplishments of the Second Wave that came before it, with reactions to the criticisms of the narrowness of that same Second Wave. As a result, the Third Wave feminism is diverse and disparate, and, therefore, difficult to define. It

resists the conditions of cohesiveness that are typically considered to make a movement. With this in mind, it must be pointed out that I did not expect the women-centered ezines that are at the centre of this exploration to simply reflect all of Third Wave feminism's characteristics. The second section of the chapter examines the potentially progressive nature of the Internet as a communication medium. Its potential for progressiveness is located primarily in its capacity to enable many-to-many communication. In particular, the Internet is considered by some to possess the capacity for hosting virtual communities, and supporting an electronic version of the democratic public sphere. While these claims are themselves subject to debate, we must constantly remind ourselves that the Internet's potential as a progressive communications medium is severely limited by the fact that a substantially large amount of the world's population remains unconnected. The third section of the chapter reviews the history and characteristics of ezines and their predecessors, print zines. It highlights the differences between the two and presents the argument that these sub-cultural, non-mainstream media serve as spaces "to test out new ideas and to imagine a different way of ordering things" (Duncombe, 1997:179-181). As such, it is suggested that zines and ezines can act as a stepping stone to political action. The last section of the chapter, the Research Plan, relates how these three areas come together to guide this exploration of women-centered ezines and outlines the approach undertaken. In this section I also explain the process that led to the selection of the ezines that serve as textual examples for this analysis.

The third and fourth chapters of the thesis contain the details of the analysis. However, first I provide descriptions of each of the ezines selected. The four ezines selected for analysis are: *Disgruntled Housewife*, *Cuntzilla*, *BUST*, and *Marigold*. I have

included sample text and images of these ezines in the Appendix, in order to give the reader a better understanding of the look and feel of these online publications. Readers may also wish to visit the ezine sites if they have a connected computer at their disposal. Chapter Three addresses the various ways in which Third Wave feminism is manifested in these women-centered ezines. Using examples, I highlight a range of Third Wave characteristics that are in evidence in the ezines, including Girly Culture and the negotiation of difference and contradiction. Chapter Four examines the manner in which these women-centered ezines take advantage of the Internet's unique capacity for many-to-many communication. Here, the idea of the Internet as a democratic medium is employed to explore the extent to which these women-centered ezines are sites of political engagement and virtual communities in support of Third Wave feminist interests.

In the conclusion, I summarize my findings and tie together different aspects of the analysis in concluding statements about the relationship between Third Wave feminism and the use of the Internet to publish ezines. I also suggest where this research fits in relation to the growing body of feminist literature concerning the intersection between gender and technology, and point to future directions of inquiry that would be useful in this area.

CHAPTER ONE

Historical Context

Introduction

The stereotypical “computer geek”, often found in popular culture representations, is a young, pimple-faced male with bad hygiene and less than impressive social skills. He is young because computers, as we know them today, are a relatively recent addition to our society. He has bad hygiene and inept social skills because he spends all of his time in front of a computer monitor writing code for his latest program or playing computer games over the Internet with other geeks, late into the night. But why is he typically a he? The historical context presented in this chapter is an attempt to provide the reader with a general understanding of the relationship women and girls have had with computer and computer-mediated technology, including the Internet, over time.

The first section, “Women, Computer Technology and the Internet” relates the extent to which women have been involved in the development of computer technology and computer science, and the ways in which they have been involved with computer technology as users over the years. It shows that, although women have been and continue to be poorly represented in the field of computer science, they have related to the technology as users for some time. Additionally, it shows that although women were greatly outnumbered by men on the Internet initially, their numbers have risen dramatically in a very short time, to equal those of male Internet users.

The purpose of the second section, “Feminist Research, Computer Technology and the Internet”, is to document the manner in which women’s relationship to computer technology and the Internet has been investigated by feminist researchers. It will also

serve to position this research in relation to other feminist inquiries regarding the intersection of gender and technology. Feminist research in this area has focused heavily on the barriers and challenges women have faced in engaging with computer technology and the Internet. While it is important to study the challenges women face with regards to new technology, it is also important to examine the positive roles it has the potential to play in their lives.

Women, Computer Technology and the Internet

Women in Computer Science

Feminist explorations of the history of women's relationship to technology are quick to point out that women have been largely absent from the technological realm and that, historically, this realm has been dominated by men. In a review of the mainstream history of computer technology, one is certain to come across a number, however limited, of female contributors. Ada Lovelace and Rear Admiral Grace Hopper are the two most frequently acknowledged women in the field.¹ While they, and a select few other women,

¹ In the United Kingdom during the mid-1800s Lovelace worked closely as a student, friend and confidant of Charles Babbage, who has been hailed as "the father of the modern computer" (Lee, 1995:423). By some accounts she was the first conceptual programmer of Babbage's Analytical Engine (Gurer, 1998:1; Lee, 1995:423). According to others, she was the world's first computer programmer (Little, 1999:202; Stanley, 1993:633), made the suggestion that Babbage use binary storage instead of a decimal system, and was the inventor of conditional branching, a powerful programming tool (Stanley, 1993:633). Others have suggested that Lovelace's intellectual contribution to Babbage's work has been exaggerated and that, while still deserving of recognition, her contribution came more in the form of interpreting and acting as a voice for Babbage's work (Campbell-Kelly & Aspray, 1996:57; Lee, 1995:423). Grace Hopper obtained her PhD in Mathematics from Yale in 1934, taught mathematics at Vassar College until 1943 and began her career with the US Naval Reserve in 1944 (Lee, 1995:383). Among her notable achievements were major contributions to programming including the development of the first compiler, A-0, which translated a programmer's instructions in the form of symbolic mathematical code into computer or machine code, in 1952. Her second compiler project, A-2, lay the foundations for the use of programming languages. In 1957 she completed development on FLOW-MATIC, the first English-language data processing compiler, which translated English language commands into machine code and from which COBOL (the Common Business- Oriented Language) evolved. This account of Hopper's accomplishments is far from complete. She is referred to as the First Lady of software, the first mother-teacher of all computer programmers and the mother of computerized data automation in the naval service.

have been acknowledged in the mainstream history of computer science for their contributions to the advancement of computer technology, women are overwhelmingly in the minority. Out of 288 people recognized for their pioneering efforts in computing history by the *International Biographical Dictionary of Computer Pioneers* (J.A.N. Lee, 1995), only 13, or 4.5%, are female. Additionally, of the people mentioned in two contemporary histories of computer technology only two percent are women (Campbell-Kelly & Aspray, 1996; Williams, 1997). Even more telling, two recent accounts of the Who's Who of computer networking technology and its rapid ascent to the status of a public communications medium, the Internet, includes not a single woman (Abbate, 1999; Randall, 1997).

Statistics concerning the number of computer science degrees granted have been used as general indicators of the proportion of women in the field. Although the statistics generated by different organizations are rarely identical, they all indicate that women have consistently represented a significantly lower proportion of computer science graduates at all levels and continue to do so.² In fact, according to the United States National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) the number of women receiving undergraduate computer science degrees³ in the United States peaked at 37% in the mid-1980s (see fig. 1). For the next ten years, both the total number of bachelor degrees, and the percentage of women receiving those degrees, experienced a period of decline. Since

² Due to the varied manners in which degrees relating to computer science are categorized by different organizations compiling statistics, the category 'Computer Science' has been used consistently to demonstrate the disproportionate representation of women receiving degrees in this area. In fact, where computer engineering was a separate category, women represented a significantly smaller proportion of degree recipients (Irwin & Friedman, 2000, March:6). Where a description of the category of 'Computer Science' was available it was included as a footnote.

³ The NCES classifies the field of computer science as follows: computer and information sciences, general; computer programming; data processing technology/technician; information science and systems; computer systems analysis; and other information sciences.

the mid-1990s the total number of degrees being awarded in computer science has begun to rise again, but the percentage awarded to women has continued a slow decline. The most recent U.S. statistics show that out of 26,852 Bachelor's degrees awarded in 1997-98 in the field of computer science, 27% were awarded to women.

Computer science degrees awarded in Canada have followed similar trends to the United States although on a considerably smaller scale (see fig. 2). Statistics Canada findings indicate that while the total number of undergraduate degrees awarded continues to increase slowly since the most recent low in 1990, the percentage of those obtained by women has declined since the mid-eighties (Statistics Canada, 1986:174; 2000:138). Having reached a high of 28% in the early and mid eighties, the percentage of computer science degrees awarded to women has hovered steadily around 20% since 1988.

Figure 1

(Source: NCES's Digest of Education, 2000, Table 283)

Figure 2

(Source: Statistics Canada, Education in Canada, 1986, Table 31; Education in Canada, 1990, Table 35; Education in Canada, 1995, Table 36; Education in Canada, 2000, Table 37)

Women's under-representation in computer science has rightfully served as cause for concern in feminist circles and driven initiatives to get women involved in the field. However, this is hardly the end of the story of women's relationship with computers. The next section explores their relationship to computer technology as users.

Women as Users of Computer and Internet Technology

While women have been poorly represented in the field of computer science, their relationship to computer technology is much more likely to be that of a user than an inventor or programmer. It has been noted that women's introduction to using computer technology was not so much by choice as it was a result of the computerization of the office (Van Zoonen, 1992:9). Women's involvement with computer technology as users has occurred in capacities, often clerical, which have not drawn the attention of mainstream historians. For the most part only feminist research has delved into women's

relationship with computer technology as users in any detail, and even it is limited and needs to be updated.

In the late 1950s, mainframe computers - predecessors of the ENIAC (Engineering Numerical Integrator and Computer), and other early models - became commercially available and by the end of the decade about 5,000 mainframes had been distributed to businesses in the United States and another couple of thousand to the rest of the world (Campbell-Kelly & Aspray, 1996:130). During the 1960s, IBM dominated the computer market and its growth increased exponentially with almost 80,000 mainframes residing in US businesses and another 50,000 in the rest of the world by 1970 (1996:130). Software had been developed for a variety of computational functions including payroll, invoicing, stock control, production planning, and other business functions. At this point very few people actually interacted with the computer and most often computer operators were men (Little, 1999:203). Women generally occupied clerical and support roles such as data entry personnel, tape librarians, and peripheral equipment operators (ibid). It was not until the late 1970s that the personal computer came on the market and only in the early eighties, with the launch of the IBM Personal Computer, that it made significant inroads into the business market as an office machine (Campbell-Kelly & Aspray, 1996:257). Launched in August of 1981, the IBM PC was so successful that it became the industry standard over the next two years. As its popularity grew most software was converted to run on the IBM machine and a succession of PC clones followed: the PC had arrived.

In her 1981 study, *Women and the Chip*, Heather Menzies noted that at the same time offices across North American were becoming computerized, women accounted for

approximately 90 percent of the clerical workforce (Menzies, 1981:1, 9). This initial study led her to project that the rapid acceptance of informatics technology⁴ for information processing and management meant that clerical workers, and therefore primarily women, faced a potential crisis of structural unemployment (Menzies, 1981:13, 73).

Fifteen years after her initial study Heather Menzies revisited and evaluated the computerized workplace in *Whose Brave New World?* (1996). She did not find that her earlier prediction of a crisis of structural unemployment for women had necessarily come true. However, she discovered that, dependent on ones' position in the hierarchy of the job market, various transformations had taken place as a result of computerization. Workers performing clerical type duties, a sector still primarily occupied by women, found their work and themselves increasingly tied to their computers (Menzies, 1996:61).⁵

⁴ Informatics involves the automation of all phases of information manipulation – such as its gathering, integrating, storing, and disseminating.

⁵ According to Menzies the clerical workers experienced a deskilling of their positions, meaning that creativity and personal autonomy became limited and workers ended up working *for* the computer which performed tasks previously performed by the workers, only faster and more efficiently (1996:61). She documented women's remarks that they made a lot more decisions before computerization, and that more steady typing and less thinking was required with the introduction of computers to the workplace. With computer terminal work dominating the workday for many, repetitive strain injury also emerged as an issue. A third consequence was the increased ease and efficiency with which workers could be monitored in a computerized workplace. Menzies explains that

Computer-monitoring exists, explicitly or implicitly, in almost every worksite today. However, its use follows clear hierarchical and gendered lines: production and support-staff workers are monitored more than managers and professionals. Women are monitored more, and more thoroughly, than men. (Menzies, 1996:118)

Figure 3**Male and Female Computer Use: 1989, 1994 and 2000**

	1989		1994		2000	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Can do anything on a computer	49%	46%	58%	56%	67%	64%
Word processing in last 12 mths	62%	64%	71%	73%	76%	78%
Data entry in last 12 mths	63%	64%	69%	66%	61%	56%
Record keeping in last 12 mths	48%	47%	61%	54%	57%	51%
Written programs in last 12 mths	31%	20%	19%	13%	18%	9%
Played games in last 12 mths	79%	68%	70%	60%	67%	61%
Used on-line data service in last 12 mths		n/a	22%	14%	56%	50%

Source: Statistics Canada General Social Surveys, Cycle 4, 1989 Education and Work; Cycle 9, 1994

Data gathered by Statistics Canada indicates that by 1989 general computer use by men and women differentiated only in specific areas (see fig. 3). According to the survey results, of the percentage of respondents who could do anything on a computer, approximately the same number of men and women had done word processing (males 62% and females 64%), data entry (males 63% and females 64%) and record keeping (males 48% and females 47%) in the previous year. Differences in computer use between the sexes in 1989 were apparent in only two areas: writing computer programs, and playing computer games.

In the results from a 1994 Statistics Canada survey, a rise in all categories, except one, shows that the number of both men and women using computers for various purposes had increased (see fig3). While the percentages between men and women remained very similar in four out of the seven categories, others showed a marked difference between the sexes. In 1994, more men had done record keeping, played

computer games and written computer programs. A new category added to the survey in 1994 indicated that 22% of men, as opposed to only 14% of women, had used an on-line data service, or the Internet, over the twelve months prior to the survey's administration. In 2000, there had not been substantial changes in the differences between any of the numbers except one. Slightly more men continued to be involved with computers in most areas. There was, however, a large jump in the number of both men and women who used an online data service.⁶

The early 1990s saw few women online in proportion to the number of men. Although figures may differ slightly depending on the source, a general pattern of growth among female users has become apparent; for the remainder of the decade the number of women online grew exponentially. According to the "First WWW User Survey" conducted by the Graphics, Visualization & Usability Center (GVU) at Georgia Tech and administered internationally, in early 1994 only five percent of online users were female (GVU, 1994, January).⁷ It was only after the World Wide Web (WWW) had reached a wide acceptance among users in 1994 (Jordan, 1999, p.42), that female traffic on the Internet began its dramatic climb. Launched in 1992, the Web made the Internet

⁶ In the 2000 survey, respondents were asked if they had used the Internet in the last twelve months, rather than an on-line data service.

⁷ The Gvu survey has an international scope, the results of which reflect use in areas with a higher rate of connection, primarily North America, Europe and Australia.

accessible to people who previously lacked the technical expertise required to negotiate the technology.⁸

With the availability of the Web and the ease with which browser applications such as Mosaic, Netscape and Internet Explorer provided access to the resources of the Internet, women's presence on-line rose significantly. In 1995 GVV's survey indicated that women's representation on-line had tripled from the previous year to 15.5% (GVV, 1995, April), and a year later had doubled again to just over 30% (GVV, 1996, April). By 1998, the most recent available survey, women made up 38.7% of online users (GVV, 1998, April).

In the U.S., Media Metrix and Jupiter Communications - two Internet research firms - released a report stating that the number of women online had actually surpassed that of men in the first quarter of 2000 (Avery, 2000, 10 August). Growing more rapidly than the overall online population, women made up 50.4% of the U.S. online population. Their study found that "women's use of the Web is highly practical, focusing on sites that save them time and money" and that "the female presence online is anchored by women aged 25-44, who account for more than 21% of all Web traffic".

⁸ The WWW made the Internet accessible by combining two fundamental components to provide "a unified and simple means of utilizing all the resources of the Internet" (Jordan, 1999:43). The first component was the establishment of a means of organizing resources by assigning them universal resource locator addresses (URLs) and arranging for these to be accessed through a procedure called hypertext transfer protocol (http). The second key component of the WWW was the development of a means of viewing information once a request for it was made; the first browser, Mosaic, was released in 1993. It was "the first simple graphical user interface (GUI) for the Web, which means it presented the information on the Web as combinations of pictures and text using hypertext" (Jordan, 1999:45).

Once (a browser) is running and connected to the net no technical knowledge beyond the ability to point and click with a mouse is needed . . . (T)here can be no doubt that the Web's ease of use is the major factor that has led the Internet into widespread public knowledge. (Jordan, 1999:44-45)

According to Statistics Canada's 1998 General Social Survey on 'Time Use', approximately 27% of the females in Canada had accessed the Internet in the previous year. At this time women made up 43% of Canadian Internet users. The survey showed that women used the Internet primarily to communicate (78.5%) and do research (70.9%) (see fig. 4). The third and fourth most popular uses were to read newspapers, magazines and books (29.2%) and to download software (27.8%).

Figure 4

(Source: Statistics Canada General Social Survey, Cycle 12, 1998 Time Use)

Conducted in 2000, Statistics Canada's most recent survey, "Access to and Use of Information Communication Technology", indicated that 50% of the female population, over the age of 15, was accessing the Internet, compared to 56% of males in Canada. At the turn of the century women made up 48% of Internet users. However, only 8% of women, who used the Internet, had put up their own webpages, compared to 18% of men.

With the number of women online reaching a state of parity or even exceeding it, there is little doubt that the Internet is no longer the boys club it was once labeled by some feminists. For example, in a 1995 article entitled "No Place for Women", Margie Wylie had argued, "Make no mistake about it, the Internet is male territory" (1995:3). While the development of the technology is still dominated by men, the online environment has evolved considerably since its early days. Prior to the mid-nineties there were not only very few women online but very little to attract them. In fact, the early growth of the Internet has been partly attributed to the ease with which it allowed users to access and distribute pornography, making the technology particularly attractive to heterosexual male users (Hughes, 1999:335; Stewart-Millar, 1998:49). This proliferation of pornography online contributed to the early 'boys club' atmosphere. While still flourishing, the online porn industry now represents a smaller component of Internet content and there is a wealth of content that is women-friendly, either targeted directly at or being useful to, women. With the percentage of female users nearing 50% and online content expanding, it seems an appropriate time to explore what is online for women. Despite the fact that they are under-represented in the technical realm of the Internet, women have taken advantage of the participatory nature of the technology and become adept content producers. At present there are many websites published by and for women, or women-centered websites, offering online services, support and resources. As I will discuss later, women-centered e-zines are one type of women-centered website available to women online.

Feminist Research, Computer Technology and the Internet

This section has two purposes. First, it serves to familiarize readers with the ways in which feminists have investigated the relationship between women and computer technology, specifically the Internet. Equally important, it highlights many of the challenges women have faced, and in many cases continue to face, with respect to Internet access. An exploration of e-zines can only occur once one has access to a computer, can afford to get connected to the Internet, develops the skills to navigate the World Wide Web, and is sufficiently comfortable in the online environment.

With computer technology, and more recently the Internet, playing an increasingly central role in western society over the last two decades, women's relationship to these technologies has become a topic of interest and concern among feminist scholars. For the most part, the strong anti-technology sentiments expressed by some approaches, such as ecofeminism⁹, have been rejected in favour of the argument that it is important for women to embrace computer and information and communication technologies if they are to play an equal role in the Information Age¹⁰. Feminist research regarding computer technology and the Internet has focused on the range of barriers and challenges faced by women. Identified across a number of areas, these challenges include

⁹ Eco-feminists perceive today's science and technology as a manifestation of men's desire to dominate nature as they dominate women. This view contends that science and technology developed by women would be fundamentally different from that developed by men and stem from an approach that would be considerate of the environment instead of one that set out to control it. In positioning "women's values" as the ideal, eco-feminism demands the rejection of science and technology developed by men.

¹⁰ The Information Age (also referred to as the Information Society, the Knowledge Society) refers to Western society's transition "from an industrial economy to one shaped by knowledge, information and the communication technologies associated with them" (Menzies, 1998, March:4). Under these conditions, the emphasis on production has been replaced by an emphasis on consumption, and manufacturing industries have been superseded in importance by service, culture and leisure industries (Stewart-Millar, 1998:63).

financial and physical access to the necessary hardware, as well as concerns with the social and physical environments surrounding computer use.

Early research in the area of computer technology was driven by the idea that during socialization, females and males developed different attitudes towards, and aptitudes for, computers. In some cases gender based differences in attitudes, ability and use were identified by researchers wherein the female students studied had comparatively negative attitudes towards computers, were less interested, had less confidence in their ability, and had a lower frequency of computer use (Collis, 1985; Shashaani, 1992). A considerable amount of research has focused on this phenomenon in order to determine how it emerges and how it is reinforced. In the early to mid-1990s it became evident that women did not have equal representation on the Internet and this realization motivated another look at the challenges encountered by women.

Charlton suggests that girls may have been deterred from computer use by two factors in the 1980s, a particularly formative time for would-be computer users interacting for the first time with the new technology. The first of these is the strong association of computers with the male domain, "as a result of their educational use being largely mathematical" (Charlton, 1999:394).¹¹ The second factor relates to the characteristics of computer games, such as mostly male characters, competitiveness and violent themes.¹² These were found to appeal largely to males and, therefore, to have

¹¹ Charlton conducted a review of research in this area (the interrelation between biological sex, sex role identity and computer orientation) which includes the following: Lockheed, 1985; Chen, 1986; Gardner, McEwen & Curry, 1986; Voogt, 1987; Campbell & Perry, 1988; Dumdell, Glissov & Siann, 1995; Miura, 1987; Temple & Lips, 1989.

¹² In the late 1970s the biggest market for applications software was for games software (Campbell-Kelly & Aspay, 1996:246). This prevalence of games software reflected the interests of the existing computer hobbyist consumer base (Ibid.).

created a sex imbalance in computer game playing.¹³ As a result, “the greater male propensity for game playing was likely to have widened sex differences in computer anxiety, attitudes, and experience” (Charlton, 1999:394). A 1997 survey conducted by the Association for Computing Machinery’s Committee on Women (ACM-W) supports this proposition (Camp, 1998).¹⁴ The survey polled members of the computing community on their views as to why the number of women in computing was declining. The number one factor respondents identified as contributing to the shrinking pipeline¹⁵, was the way computer games were developed and marketed by and for males in the early eighties, thereby predisposing males to a higher degree of familiarity.

Several studies also documented a “chilly climate” faced by females when it came to computer use in educational settings (Alloway, 1995; Kramarae and Kramer, 1995; Spender, 1994; Davies in Spender, 1994; Kiesler, Sproull & Eccles, 1985;).¹⁶ The research seemed to suggest that girls and women needed safe and welcoming environments in which they could use computers without being intimidated by male users

¹³ Research reviewed by Charlton includes the following: Temple & Lips, 1989; Mohamedali, Messer & Fletcher, 1987; Culley, 1988.

¹⁴ It must be noted that the survey was conducted on a small scale with 111 unique responses being tabulated (Camp, 1998). The select group of respondents was made up of members of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM).

¹⁵ The shrinking pipeline refers to the declining number of women working towards undergraduate degrees in computer science. At the end of the shrinking pipeline, therefore, there will be fewer and fewer women trained to work in the field of computer science and fewer women going on to obtain graduate degrees.

¹⁶ According to Alloway, girls in a pre-school classroom setting were reluctant to challenge the aggressive tactics engaged in by boys to maintain their dominance over a computer terminal (Alloway, 1995). The boys went so far as to undertake physical aggression such as pushing and shoving, hitting, pinching and even biting, and verbal threats in order to monopolize computers. In one preschool, boys formed an exclusively male computer club and refused to let girls have access to the computer (Kiesler, Sproull & Eccles, 1985:454).

In Spender’s experience, even in the classrooms that had enough computers for all the students, boys still managed to dominate the terminals and repel the girls (Spender, 1995:178).

Higher up in the education system, university computer labs have been described as not only unpleasant places for women to be, but as “highly threatening and abusive environments for females” (Davies in Spender, 1994:182; Kramarae and Kramer, 1995:16).

or their activities. Kiesler, Sproull and Eccles indicated that, in the preschool classroom, once the boys' monopoly over the computers was discouraged with timesharing rules, girls were equally eager and enthusiastic about using the computers (1985:454).

According to this research, women and girls only needed to be given access to computer equipment, appropriate training and freedom from "lifelong training in 'femininity'"¹⁷ in order to become full participants in computer technology.

Recommendations include the notion that the social perceptions of computing and those who use computers need to be challenged and deconstructed. Karen Coyle counseled the following:

. . . . what we need is a conspiracy of sisters that begins with the recognition that there is nothing inherently masculine about computers. We must learn to read the computer culture for the social myth that it is. And we have to teach our younger generation of women that they are free to explore computers in their own way and to draw their own conclusions about the usefulness of these machines. (Coyle, 1996, p. 54)

Some feminist researchers have endeavored to uncover other female pioneers, who had not been acknowledged in mainstream history books and therefore rendered invisible, in order to dispel the notion that computers and women do not mix. Efforts have been made to increase the visibility of these 'forgotten' female pioneers by honoring them at events such as the Grace Hopper Celebration Conference and inducting them into the Women in Technology International (WITI) Hall of Fame. There have also been attempts to explain

¹⁷ This phrase is borrowed from Janice Manchee who states that "Women are ghettoized due to unequal access to necessary training and education and life-long training in 'femininity'" (1984:46).

why these women were never recognized in mainstream history in the first place (Light, 1999).¹⁸ These female pioneers in computing are intended to serve as role models for women and encourage them not only to use computers to their advantage but also to enter the fields of computer science or engineering.

Other feminists have argued that we need to question the origins of the technology and the discourses that surround it, and problematize the structures that govern its production and distribution. If we position the problem as simply having to “catch up”, we fail to address the social relations in which technology is embedded. Technology is not neutral; it emerges from and exists within a specific social context. It cannot be “divorced from the context in which (it was) designed, manufactured and disseminated”, as the “add women and stir” remedy implies (Stewart Millar, 1998:57).

As a result some feminist research has found challenges to women’s involvement with computer technology, and specifically the Internet, in greater structural oppression stemming from the economic system and a gendered division of labour. Here, the primary issue of Internet accessibility for women is related to affordability. In her “Report on the Use of the Internet in Canadian Women’s Organizations” (1996) commissioned by Status of Women Canada, Leslie Regan Shade highlighted the financial challenges faced by women. Whereas female professionals and postsecondary students likely have access to the Internet for free, many women are without such advantages (Shade, 1996:7). Even with prices on their way down, acquiring a computer remains a

¹⁸ Jennifer Light highlights the experience of the “ENIAC girls”, six women hired to operate an early mainframe computer, the ENIAC (Engineering Numerical Integrator and Computer). Light suggests that “(t)he omission of women from the history of computer science perpetuates misconceptions of women as uninterested or incapable in the field” (1999:455).

significant purchase for anyone on a tight budget. Being connected to the Internet is an additional cost that requires the user to be able to support monthly payments to an Internet Service Provider.¹⁹ This is considered a challenge for women in particular because, on average, women earn less money than men do (Spender, 1995:170; Shade, 1998:34; Warnick, 1999:8). A 1995 Statistics Canada report stated that

... although females account for 50.4% of the Canadian population, this equality in numbers does not correspond to socioeconomic equality for women ... the female to male earnings ratio was 73% in 1995, and the earnings of women were significantly lower than men in all occupational categories and at all levels of educational attainment. (in Shade, 1998, p34)

In 1998 the 'Household Internet Use Survey' by Statistics Canada indicated that even though Internet use had risen from 18% of Canadians in 1994 to 36%, "households headed by men" were more likely to have Internet access than those "headed by women".²⁰ When income was factored in, it became apparent that the reason for this was that women more often fell into lower income quartiles (Statistics Canada, 1998). Internet use varied strongly by income, with those households in the highest quartile more likely to use the Internet.

The economic cost in attaining a computer has been attributed, in part, to decisions made in the design and production processes. For instance, earlier advocating of the 'distributive model' over the 'network model' for computers in the home, by big name corporations such as Microsoft, demanded a personal computer on a desk in every home (Winseck, 1998, p362). This model required that the user cover a greater portion

¹⁹ Although Freenets have provided free service their service has been considered to be of lower quality than the pay per service providers'. It is encouraging to note that more free service providers have been surfacing over the last few months. Perhaps this has been a result of the realization that more money is accumulated from Web advertising dollars rather than user fees.

²⁰ The head of the household is determined by which sex is the primary bread winner.

of the expense, thus putting women at a greater disadvantage. The network option, on the other hand, proposed hooking people up to a network by means of the television set or cheap, 'stupid' computers at a considerably lower cost to the consumer.²¹ The decision to pursue the distributive model appears to have been made on the basis of it generating greater profit than on the ideal of universal access.

In an attempt to widen access, computer terminals with Internet capabilities, or public access network sites, were set up in public libraries and community centers with the goal of providing universal service. This attempt was criticized for falling short of addressing the needs of those who required training in order to use the service, or those who would find it difficult to leave the house, such as the disabled, the elderly and women with small children (Shade, 1998:37). Shade stated that "true access and ubiquity will not be attained until networked technology is 'easily' and economically brought into the home". She asks:

Should tax credits be made available to telecommunication carriers that contribute to a universal access fund? Should the telecommunications and computer industries be encouraged to develop a standard 'information appliance' . . . which would allow low-income users to access the Internet?
(Shade, 1998:37)

Shade also pointed to a second issue of access for women concerning the time they had available to surf the web. She states that, "Women, because of their prescribed gender roles, generally have less leisure time than men" (Shade, 1998:41). Even with a

²¹ More recently the network model has been redeemed, and is being endorsed and pursued by the major players, including Microsoft, as a way to widen the market that can be reached on-line (Winseck, 1998, p363). While this trend will undoubtedly make the Internet more easily accessible to a larger segment of the population, it has been implied that the network model will not offer the same level of services that is provided by the distributive model. The question now might be whether we would see the emergence of an "information middle class" in between the information rich and information poor.

computer at their disposal, the triple workload of paid-work, housework and childcare often takes priority over women's leisure time.

Feminist research has also suggested that further challenges to women's online participation exist in the on-line interaction between men and women based on the existence of "masculine and feminine styles of communication". Soukup (1999) and Herring (1999) posit that the same gender specific, asymmetrical relationship that has been identified between men and women in the real world, is reproduced in online interactions.²² In particular, masculine styles of communication dominate feminine ones (Soukup, 1999; Herring, 1999). In both studies, female participants pursuing their own agendas, talking among themselves, and expressing independent views met with interruption and challenges from male participants. Soukup's research on gendered interactional patterns in chatrooms revealed that male communication styles generally involved stereotypical masculine gender roles. These were reflected in argumentative patterns of interaction fueled by competition, aggression and confrontation, personal attacks on other participants' masculinity, and sexual humor (Soukup, 1999:172). Feminine communication also reflected stereotypical feminine roles of co-operation, emotionality, relationship building and establishing rapport. Studies on asynchronous and synchronous communication done by Soukup and Herring suggested, therefore, that women were not free to interact equally, due to the disruptive nature of interventions by

²² The idea that gender does not matter or is not taken into account on the Internet is questionable; it is something participants are curious about and once they know, drives their expectations of the behavior of others and their reactions to that behavior (Soukup, 1999:170). Spears and Lea have indicated that "(t)raditional male/female power differences are reflected in floortaking, response attention, and communication style, so that the assumption of gender anonymity in CMC (computer mediated communication) ultimately breaks down" (in Soukup, 1999:170).

male participants.²³ It is significant to note that this was not only the result of male participants displaying stereotypical masculine behavior, but also of women resorting to stereotypical female behavior in response to male intervention. Of note is also the manner in which this approach adopts/reflects essentialist notions of male and female styles of communication, not allowing that women can be aggressive and overbearing or that men can be quiet and passive.

Another issue identified as a challenge to women's equal participation online is harassment. Cases of on-line harassment have been documented as having the potential to deter women from using the Internet. Although not clearly defined, harassment over the Internet, was found to occur in both public forums and in private e-mail. It involved everything from personal questions directed to a female user, to the delivery of sexual propositions via e-mail, to what was referred to as "virtual rape" (Shade, 1996:11; Kramarae and Kramer, 1995:18; Spender, 1995:203). Depending on the severity of the

²³ Some female participants have attempted to overcome these types of problems by establishing women-only spaces that are meant to privilege feminine communication. Not only are these a source of controversy but often males participate anyway.

harassment, women and girls were driven to annoyance or effectively turned off computer use as a result of disturbing encounters.²⁴

It is difficult to know how prevalent such activities are on the Internet or the percentage of women who encounter harassment and to what extent this guides their behaviour and/use of the technology. Despite the lack of statistics, some of the examples provided by researchers in this area prove disturbing enough to warrant consideration. It is also relevant to acknowledge that the anonymity granted by the technology may increase the chances of harassment occurring more often and with perhaps, less thought, less guilt or chance of being caught than in real life (Branwyn, 1993:788).

. . . the nature of computer-mediated-communication (its slant towards anonymity, lack of personal contact, etc.) tends to encourage more flamboyant, outrageous or nasty behavior. (Brail, 1996)

. . . anonymity may not only foster playful disinhibition, but reduce social accountability, making it easier for users to engage in hostile, aggressive acts. (Herring, 1999, p153)

As computer technology and the Internet have come to play an increasingly central role in society, feminist scholars have also examined discourse in order to explore

²⁴ In one well-known case, a character named Mr. Bungle "used textual commands to sexually abuse personalities created by real women in the virtual community of LambdaMOO" (Kramarae and Kramer, 1995, p18). " 'Mr. Bungle' took control of the characters of two female players and caused them to perform sexually degrading actions on themselves with knives and other weapons" (Herring, 1999, p152). In this example textually enacted rape took place in a public forum in front of all other participants logged on at the time. Some might argue that no physical harm was inflicted. Regardless of the nature or extent of harm inflicted, such attacks do not lend themselves to the creation of a space of equality and may in fact deter women from using the technology. In the real world women make an effort to avoid putting themselves in situations where they might be subject to harassment, such as walking alone at night. The same behaviour transferred to Internet technology means either limiting ones use of the technology or ceasing use altogether. While much of the time harassment involves annoying, repetitive propositioning of female users who are identified by their user name or asked specifically to identify themselves as male or female, the ensuing private messages can also be extremely distressing for the recipient. In one instance a woman reported receiving messages on Valentines Day which said that she "would have her throat cut and be gangbanged, 'fucked to death', for a Valentine's Day treat" (Spender, 1995, p203). Despite the virtual nature of the messages they can be extremely disconcerting considering that the receiver has no idea as to the seriousness of the threats and the extent to which they might be carried out.

the intersection of gender and computer technology. Examining discourse offers a means of exploring the way meaning is constructed and analyzing the circulation and reinforcement of power relations within a given cultural and historical context. The acceptance of discourse analysis as an effective tool in such pursuits is based on the following understanding: "It is through language that our world is socially constructed and given meaning and that power relations are formally established and reproduced" (Stewart Millar, 1998:68). In short, we understand the world around us through the interpretation of multiple intersecting discourses. Discourse analysis requires a critical approach to the study of text and talk and may incorporate the analysis of other modes of communication such as symbols, graphics and styles of presentation. Such is the case of Melanie Stewart Millar's study in *Cracking the Gender Code* (1998). According to Stewart Millar, the socio-cultural environment within which information communication technology exists is not becoming more conducive to the development of a positive relationship between women and technology. Instead, her study of *Wired* magazine indicated that mainstream *digital discourse* serves to reinforce beliefs that perpetuate inequalities of gender, race and class, and re-entrench traditional stereotypes and gendered imbalances of power.²⁵

Stewart Millar identifies digital discourse as the discourse that has both accompanied and facilitated the development of digital technology and its rapid dispersion in Western industrial society.

This emerging digital discourse, brought to us by leading technologists, computer industry elites and journalists, performs a

²⁵ In Stewart Millar's words, *Wired* "is an excellent example of the new ideological discourse that is emerging around new information and communication technologies . . . (and) has become an icon of digital culture" (1998, p. 69). For these reasons it was selected for her study of digital discourse.

number of important functions in society: it stimulates the social need for digital services, circulates myths of technotopia, popularizes new language and metaphors, and, of course, it sells digital hardware and software itself. (Stewart Millar, 1998:24)

However, Stewart Millar claims that digital discourse is more than merely a way of selling digital technology to society. She posits that it emphasizes certain beliefs, values, social and political policies, including “an acute faith in speed, technology and technological progress, political libertarianism, corporate imperialism . . . sexism and racism, scientific reductionism and environmental exploitation” (Stewart Millar, 1998:201). Specifically, her analysis of the discourse disseminated by *Wired* revealed that the power imbalances between masculinity and femininity are re-generated and perpetuated within digital discourse. She found that when women do appear in the magazine, the construction of femininity adheres closely to traditional stereotypes. The virginal, ultra feminine cyber-Barbie - a motherly type or the girl next door - is juxtaposed with the cyber-femme fatale – “the whore to cyber-Barbie’s virgin” (1998:103-05). In the pages of *Wired* cyber-Barbies typically occupy non-threatening roles such as teachers, mother and librarians, exude family values, and are subservient, domestic, beautiful and nurturing. Cyber-femme fatales, on the other hand, are sexually aggressive and violently predatory, secretly awaiting the cyber-warrior who will tame them. The portrayal of the cyber-femme fatale suggests “that cyberspace is filled with sexually promiscuous and available women, aggressively surfing the Net in search of hypermacho men”. The hypermacho man is digital discourse’s quintessential construction of masculinity. “(He) exhibits an intensified and accelerated form of machismo intimately associated with his close relationship to high technology” (1998:203). From the CEOs of high-tech companies to the muscled video game heroes

who grace *Wired's* pages, those who personify this hypermacho masculinity exude power that is derived directly from their association with and mastery over technology.

Stewart-Millar proposed that the value of analyzing emerging discourses lies in the clues that may be derived about the direction in which society is moving. She explained that emerging discourses “let us see how knowledge is constructed, how truths are deployed and identities altered. They also offer us a way to see how power is being circulated and how different social interests would like to organize our society in the future” (Stewart-Millar, 1998:67). However, the narrow focus of her study implicitly neglects the idea that meaning is constructed through the intersection of *multiple, often conflicting*, discourses.

In another study, Barbara Warnick examined discourse in books, trade periodicals, and gateway sites inviting women online during and prior to 1997 (1999). Her analysis considered “how ideology is embedded in this invitational discourse, how the presence and promise of new technologies can affect how women think about themselves and their relation to them, and how elitist discourse excludes and marginalizes women even while it attempts to invite them online” (1999:2). Discourse analysis served as an effective approach to studying computer mediated communication (CMC) Warnick contends because CMC is a

discursive environment in which communicators support values and ideologies, influence one another, and shape beliefs and attitudes. . . (T)he critic can discern how audiences are hailed or interpellated, how metanarratives are constructed, how style enhances message appeal, and how certain interests are marginalized in CMC. This can be done by studying texts as systems: noting recurrent patterns of appeal, construction of ethos in texts, who can speak, who is silenced, and how identities are discursively constructed. (Warnick, 1999:3)

The results of Warnick's study showed that prior to 1997 many appeals for women to get online "valued activity, aggression, currency, technology and wealth, and they devalued their opposites – passivity, hesitancy, convention, and poverty" (1999:6). She suggests that such appeals may have served to marginalize and exclude women at the same time as attempting to invite and include them. The print media Warnick examined informed women that getting connected to the Internet would provide them with access to wealth and success in all areas in their lives and that if they did not get online they would be left behind. It did not however, address the challenges of cost, time and unfamiliarity faced disproportionately by women. The "just *do it*" appeals that emanated from women's general interest periodicals "ignored the economic and lifestyle realities of many women" (1999:10-11). Warnick also found the discourse generated by the first cohort of women online to be elitist and hierarchically motivated. This first cohort heralded themselves as courageous explorers, fearlessly and aggressively establishing a space for themselves in male-dominated cyberspace (ibid). While they encouraged other women to get online, they also implied that effective negotiation of the online environment required women to adopt stereotypical male traits such as aggression, independence and technological know-how. According to Warnick

(this first cohort of women is) portrayed in their own self descriptions and appeals as opportunistic, savvy, dynamic, resourceful, and forward looking. Absent and tacitly devalued are those women who are not technology literate or who are viewed as passive, unskilled, hesitant, or controlled by forces of which they themselves do not take control. (Warnick, 1999:12)

Warnick explained that this invitational discourse, which aligned the use of Internet technology with masculine characteristics, might have served to alienate some women. In

this case the intersection of these discourses of gender and technology was found to associate Internet technology with traditional notions of masculinity and disassociate it from traditional notions of femininity. If women have felt alienated by such invitational discourse as Warnick suggested, the significant increase in their numbers online over the last five years does not reflect this. Whereas Warnick posited that this invitational discourse might have alienated women, on another level it also could have been perceived as introducing an alternative to traditional femininity. Such a view might consider that this discourse offered women a reason to get online. Here was a space where women could shed the binding ties of traditional femininity and assume a more aggressive persona, perhaps even contribute to constructing new definitions of femininity.

Warnick also identified the emergence of what she considered to be a more positive stream of discourse among newer non-commercial websites targeted at young women and teenage girls: online, electronic versions of zines called "e-zines". These sites tended to emphasize opportunities for self-expression, humor, and social support, provide valuable information resources and forums for discussion, and cater to a wide range of interests (1999:14). For Warnick this new stream of sites had the potential to significantly enhance the appeal of Internet technology to women.

These developments on the web may lead to communication environments more accepting toward women . . . , a portion of the web may become a place where people provide support, advice, entertainment, and assistance to one another. By engendering new uses for CMC these new sites are "degendering the computer" (p. 134) and also constructing welcoming places where invitational discourse becomes truly inviting. (1999:16)

There has been very little research done on women-centered ezines. In fact, the only research I managed to locate that focused exclusively on women-centered ezines was a Master's research paper, titled *Girls Need Modems* (1998), by Krista Scott, a graduate student in the Women's Studies department at York University. Scott's paper is an examination of "the ways in which the intersection of cyberspace and gender is presently being theorized" and attempts to "test these theories against the texts (ezines) themselves to see which ideas are most useful analytically and strategically" (1998:3). Scott draws on Herring's work on gendered interaction online (1996), Miller's examination of the use of metaphor of the frontier in describing cyberspace (1995), Rheingold's vision of the Internet as a site of participatory democracy (1995), Turkle's notion of the online environment fostering identity play (1995), and Haraway's cyborg myth (1991). In the end, Scott does not present a conclusion with respect to which of the approaches proved most useful in her analysis. She does, however, conclude that women-centered ezines serve as a valuable point of entry into discourse around and about technology.

Conclusion

In my attempt to familiarize the reader with the women's historical relationship with computer technology, I have outlined the historical circumstances out of which women-centered ezines have emerged. I have also shown that feminist research in this area is heavily weighted towards shedding light on the barriers and challenges women face in their interactions with computer technology and specifically the Internet. Given the contents of this chapter, it is my understanding that feminist research into the intersection of gender and technology will benefit from a more broad-based exploration

of a specific genre of women-centered ezines. This project will compliment Scott's research, as it aims to provide a broader understanding of the same genre of women-centered ezines. This analysis will contribute to the growing feminist research documenting the evolving relationship of women and the Internet.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Background

Introduction

Three different bodies of literature underpin this exploration of women-centered ezines. Each acts as a window through which different aspects of women-centered ezines may be examined and together they provide the basis for the development of an understanding of the medium and its characteristics. The first section outlines the emergence of what is being referred to as a *third wave of feminism*. The second section examines the Internet's potential as a progressive medium, that is, its ability to support virtual communities and function as a democratic medium by means of its unique capacity for many-to-many communication. Lastly, zines and ezines are introduced. Following a brief history and description of the characteristics of these media, the extent to which zines/ezines may be examples of counterhegemonic culture is discussed. The final section presents the research plan that was undertaken for this project.

The Third Wave

(T)he negotiation of contradiction and difference defines contemporary feminist movements. This, of course, requires rethinking what movements might look like, what activism might look like, what "identity" and "community" might mean.
(Drake, 1997:99)

In what Deborah Siegel refers to as the "oceanography of feminism," the First and Second waves of feminism have been mapped out relatively clearly (Siegel, 1997:52). Most people are familiar with the use of the term "First Wave" to describe activism engaged in by women beginning in the mid-1800s and concluding with the women's suffrage campaign in 1920. The primary issues they worked for were voting rights and temperance causes. The "Second Wave" refers to organizing that began in the late 1960s

and concentrated on areas of wage equity, critiquing beauty culture, establishing a vocabulary to name women's experiences, such as wife abuse and date rape, reproductive freedom, and developing "gender" and "sexism" as key categories of analysis (Heywood & Drake, 1997:23). The term "Third Wave" first surfaced in the mid-eighties and has most commonly been used in reference to feminists who came of age in the eighties and early nineties.²⁶ Apart from this, feminism's Third Wave is not easily described in a concise or straightforward manner. One reason is that, ultimately, the Third Wave is still evolving. Another reason is that the absence of a succinct, specific definition is in itself a central feature of the Third Wave, which is disparate and factional in nature. Despite the difficulties associated with this feature of the Third Wave, I have attempted to relate an inclusive and coherent description. It will become clear that it is the Third Wave of the feminist movement that may require, as the above quote suggests, rethinking what a movement should or could look like.

The first point of agreement in discussions of the Third Wave is that its emergence is the result of changing times. Having grown up with the accomplishments and groundwork established by the Second Wave feminist movement, today's young women face a different historical and social context than those before them. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, editors of *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*, suggest that the lives of young women "have been shaped by struggles between various feminisms as well as cultural backlash against feminism and activism"

²⁶ Ednie Kaeh Garrison points out that while "Third Wave feminism" often refers to the organizing of young women, it should not be considered a mark of generational specificity but a mark of historical specificity (Garrison, 2000:144-145). Otherwise, she notes, it severely limits who can claim Third Wave politics as their own and discounts the Third Wave's origins in criticism launched against the category of "women" and the dominance of the white-middle class feminists during the Second Wave.

(1997:2). While they have grown up with the accomplishments of the Second Wave, Third Wave feminists have taken issue with the movement's exclusivity and narrowness and Third Wave feminism has emerged in response to these criticisms. In agreement with Heywood and Drake, Deborah Siegel explains that, at the same time, the Third Wave is a response to the suggestion that society has entered into a post-feminist era.²⁷

When Rebecca Walker asserts in the pages of *Ms. Magazine*, "I am not a postfeminist feminist. I am the third wave," for example, the mobilization of the adjective "third" becomes an act of strategic defiance. Such an insistence on the continuation of feminists movement (*I am* the third wave) resists narrative scripts that imply that women's movements are no longer moving, no longer vital, no longer relevant. . . . When used in this context, "third wave" becomes a stance of political resistance to popular pronouncements of a moratorium on feminism and feminists. (Siegel, 1997:52)

In addition, Michelle Sidler points out, today's youth face considerable economic uncertainty, underemployment, education debt, and fast moving technology (1997:31). Inevitably, this environment has resulted in shifting ideas about the role of feminism, its goals, and practices.

Heywood and Drake define feminism's Third Wave as follows:

a movement that contains elements of second wave critique of beauty culture, sexual abuse, and power structures while it also acknowledges and makes use of the pleasure, danger, and defining power of those structures. (Heywood & Drake, 1997:3)

This statement suggests that Third Wave feminism not only draws on elements of the Second Wave but is considered to be part of an evolutionary process that builds on

²⁷ The "post feminist condition", often hailed by the media as that which dominates currently, refers to the notion that in the late twentieth century feminism fell out of favour following the wars over political correctness and that women no longer identify with the goals of the movement. In fact, "(i)n a 1998 piece for *The New York Observer*, Erica Jong noted that *Time* has claimed feminism was dead at least 119 times since 1969" (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000:93).

lessons learned from the past. For certain, the Third Wave of feminism is inspired by the same basic desire for women's legal, political, and social equality as the waves that came before it and has inherited both issues and strategies for dealing with them from its predecessor. Yet, in as much as it is agreed that the Third Wave has evolved from the Second Wave, as the metaphor of waves intimates, some of the fundamental features of Third Wave feminism have emerged in response to feminist criticisms of feminisms that came before (Garrison, 2000:145).

An emphasis on negotiating and making room for difference has been identified in many discussions as a central characteristic of Third Wave feminism (Reed, 1997:124; Heywood & Drake, 1997:2,3; Klein, 1997:207; Cox, Johnson, Newitz & Sandell, 1997:198; Drake, 1997:99; Siegel, 1997:54). The roots of this particular characteristic can be located in the criticisms leveled at the Second Wave by Third World feminists, and/or women-of-colour (Garrison, 2000:145; Heywood & Drake, 1997:9; Siegel, 1997:57). They charged that the Second Wave movement was dominated by white middle-class feminists and problematized the use of the category "women", asserting that the interests being addressed did not necessarily include those of women-of-colour, poor/workingclass women, lesbians etc. Heywood and Drake suggest that

what third wave feminists seek and find in the writing of hooks, Hazel Carby, Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldua, Maxine Hong Kingston, Ntozake Shange, Patricia Hill Collins, Bharati Muherjee, Patricia Williams, Ana Castillo, Coco Fusco, Toni Morrison, and so many others, is languages and images that account for multiplicity and difference, that negotiate contradiction in affirmative ways, and that give voice to a politics of hybridity and coalition. (Heywood and Drake, 1997:9)

Third Wave feminists reject the notion of "women" as a unified category or group.

Instead, they strive to acknowledge the intricacies of power and privilege, that oppression

takes many forms and occurs on many different levels, and attempt to understand their roles as both oppressors and oppressed. Rather than coming together as “women” then, bell hooks suggests that what unites the Third Wave is a *commonality of feeling*, or a yearning, to exist in a more *just* world (hooks in Heywood & Drake, 1997:50). In a similar vein, Baumgardner and Richards, authors of *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*, explain that

there will never be one platform for action that all women agree on. But that doesn’t mean feminism is confused. What it does mean is that feminism is as various as the women it represents. What weaves a feminist movement together is a consciousness of inequities and a commitment to changing that. (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000:47-48)

Carol Guess suggests that this emphasis on contradiction, difference and multiplicity may also partly be attributable to a more recent poststructuralist influence that questions the notion of identity as knowable, stable, or coherent and instead posits that identity is fragmented, fluid, unknowable (Guess, 1997:156-157). The Third Wave echoes a “postmodernist feminist sensibility” in its lack of specificity with regards to either identity or agenda (Siegel, 1997:53; Garrison, 2000:149). Garrison notes:

(a)nother indicator of the “postmodern” nature of the Third Wave is its reliance on networking among different cohorts of women who compose a movement culture that is disparate, unlikely, multiple, polymorphous. . . Unlike many white feminists in the early years of the Second Wave who sought to create the resistant subject “women,” in the Third Wave, this figure “women” is rarely a unitary subject. (Garrison, 2000:149)

For the Third Wave to be thought of as a movement, what constitutes a movement must be re-thought. This is not a movement, in the sense of being a unified “body of persons with common object”, as defined by the *Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (1985:481). The Third Wave is made up of diverse, often relatively disparate, groups and

individuals woven together by networks that yield hybrids or coalitions at various nodes or hubs; it is a web of smaller, often temporary, movements that comprise a larger, seemingly organic movement.

A second criticism of Second Wave feminism that has shaped the Third Wave concerns the use by the former of an approach that is referred to by some as “victim feminism”. The Second Wave’s focus on women as victims of oppression has been characterized as being out of touch, irrelevant and even a harmful perspective for women to hold. The reasoning behind this is that if women only see themselves as victims they will have limited recourse to challenge and change their status. Second Wave feminists are also accused of “prescribing ‘correct’ forms of feminine behavior, especially in relation to sexuality” and academic feminists as being “rigidly dogmatic and irreparably esoteric. . . confining (themselves) to a realm of theory with no tangible significance in either the political or the personal sphere” (Sorasio, 1997:134-135). Consequently, Third Wave feminism advocates self-empowerment, pleasure and a do-it-yourself culture that thrives outside academic circles for ‘everywoman’ to consume. According to Catherine Orr, the fact that the Third Wave is swelling outside of academia is cause for optimism. She reminds us that it was in this arena that “feminism captured the popular imagination – and thus political clout – in the late 1960s and early 1970s” (1997:41).

While some may question the relevance an emphasis on pleasure has to the pursuit of social change, bell hooks expresses the basis for this approach in the following passage.

All too often our political desires for change is seen as separate from longings and passions that consume lots of time and energy in daily life. . . . [But] surely our desire for radical social change is

intimately linked with the desire to experience pleasure, erotic fulfillment, and a host of other passions. (hooks in Drake, 1997:107)

The weaknesses in this emphasis on pleasure and fulfillment, sexual or otherwise, become evident when this approach is taken to extremes. This is the case in what Jennifer Drake refers to as “the conservative Third Wave feminisms of Naomi Wolf, Katie Roiphe, and Rene Denfield,”²⁸ also called “power feminism”, “capitalist feminism”, and “do me feminism” (Drake, 1997:107). “Power feminism”, a term coined by Naomi Wolf, demands women not play the victim, take charge of their situations, and embrace capitalistic individualism and their own sexuality as a means to power (Soriso, 1997:134-135). While the media revels in the return of femininity and routinely gives it prominence as the “new” feminism, critics suggest that power feminism is merely buying into traditional power structures. In some circles Wolf, Roiphe and Denfield are considered to be members of the post-feminist camp, or essentially anti-feminist (Orr, 1997: Heywood & Drake, 1997:1). Drake posits that while power feminism appeals to some women and the “feminist-fearing media”, it exploits the powerful kinship between pleasure and social change to the point that “the link between them is broken and only self-indulgent pleasure is left” (Drake, 1997:107). “Power feminism,” Drake continues, “doesn’t really understand how power works and doesn’t recognize its own complexities” (1997:107). Likewise, Carolyn Soriso and Catherine Orr criticize it for its tendency towards generalizations and paying little attention to, or even trivializing, issues of race

²⁸ Naomi Wolf, often heralded as contributing to the revival of feminism with *The Beauty Myth* in 1990, wrote *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the Twenty-first Century* in 1993. Katie Roiphe is the author of *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism* (1993) and Rene Denfield is the author of *The New Victorians: A Young Woman’s Challenge to the Old Feminist Order* (1995).

and class (Soriso, 1997: 140-143, Orr, 1997:36). Orr points out that the negotiation of feminism's contradictions is virtually absent from the work of Wolf and Roiphe.

Instead of navigating contradictions, these authors (Wolf and Roiphe) deny that feminism necessarily and inevitably holds contradictions. They imagine there is some pure outside where women can stand free of both gendered oppression and other forms of exploitation . . . (For example), Wolf's feminism is about getting more for women – more money, more power, more pleasure. In outlining her project, she demonstrates a blatant disregard for the position of U.S. women (whom she assumes to be a rather unproblematic class regardless of economic, race, and political differences) within late capitalism, let alone the position of women in developing nations in relation to first world economies. Roiphe and Wolf can argue their visions of feminism insofar as they deny the differences among women. (Orr, 1997:36)

In other words, if women refuse to acknowledge and develop an understanding of the complex systems of power and oppression that exist around and among them, they will be unable to devise strategies to overcome the inequities that are concealed within those systems. The Third Wave, then, must negotiate between victim feminism and power feminism in order to accommodate lessons from the past and adjust for the present and the future.

Baumgardner and Richards describe Third Wave feminism as “feminism for a culture-driven generation” (2000:134). They differentiate it from the cultural feminism of the Second Wave – that which spawned women owned and operated cultural production facilities, and all-women cultural events and organizations. Politics figured prominently in the seventies and could even be considered the culture of the time with Kennedy, Vietnam, civil rights and women's rights at the forefront (2000:130). Yet Baumgardner and Richards suggest that “for the Third Wave, politics was superseded by culture – punk rock, hip-hop, zines, products, consumerism, and the Internet”(2000:130).

This “media-savvy, culture driven generation” has turned to what they know. Garrison explains that Third Wave feminists “claim feminist agency for themselves and each other by making use of a historically situated repertoire of cultural objects and images, codes, and signs in self-consciously political ways” (2000:143). Within this repertoire Third Wave feminists have access to and make use of a variety of tools including print and visual media; music genres, technologies, and cultures; girl-positive and woman-positive expressions; revolutionary and social justice discourses; shock tactics; nonviolent actions; and the Internet.

This repertoire is utilized by Third Wave feminists to raise consciousness about, provide political commentary on, and resist and educate against racism, child abuse, rape, domestic violence, homophobia and heterosexism, ablism, fatism, environmental degradation, classism, the protection of healthcare rights, reproductive rights, and equity. It is a tool kit designed for providing access to and transformations of traditionally masculinist cultural institutions. (Garrison, 2000:143)

These multiple and various approaches to feminism have only recently come to be discussed as a third wave of feminism, thereby elevating their visibility and suggesting that the idea of what makes a movement may have to be revisited and redefined. As Baumgardner and Richards explain of Third Wave approaches, “all are expanding feminism. . . . but in very different ways” (2000:79). The diversity of the Third Wave is evident in the following three examples: the Third Wave Foundation, Girlie Culture and Riot Grrrl.

Third Wave Foundation

The Third Wave Foundation could be considered a more traditional hub of Third Wave feminism, as it draws heavily on Second Wave tactics. With over 5000 members

across the US, the Third Wave Foundation bills itself as the “only national activist philanthropic organization for young women between the ages of 15 and 30” (Third Wave Foundation, 2001). It currently has three chapters, located in New York City, San Francisco and Madison, Wisconsin, that work to develop and support young women activists through grants, networking and public education. The foundation describes its purpose as follows:

Third Wave is led by young men and women who reflect the diversity of America. We strive to combat inequalities that we all face as a result of our age, gender, race, sexual orientation, economic status or level of education. Third Wave supports young women leading a broad range of movements, from campaigning for a living wage or environmental protections, to opposing private prisons and reproductive rights. By expanding feminism to include a range of voices and developing the leadership of young women across the country, Third Wave is building a strong and sustainable feminist movement that will lead social change into the future. (Third Wave Foundation, 2001)

The foundation’s grants include “The Reproductive Rights Fund” designated to the “financial support of activities that directly expand young women's rights and access to reproductive healthcare and education”. The fund is specifically directed to the training of new abortion providers, increasing access to reproductive healthcare services in underserved areas, reproductive healthcare education, and providing emergency grants for abortion procedures or supporting similar programs. A second grant fund is “The Organizing and Advocacy Fund”, which “supports organizing and activism work that exists to challenge sexism, racism, homophobia, economic injustice, and other forms of oppression”.

The Third Wave Foundation has also developed and launched a number of public education campaigns. “Why Give” encourages the redistribution of wealth by educating

people about the growing divide between rich and poor and the role philanthropy plays in progressive social change. "I Spy Sexism" teaches people to identify and take effective action against sexism that occurs on a day-to-day basis around them. The "Why Vote" campaign encourages young women not only to vote but to become activists in every aspect of the political process. "Action Alerts" raises awareness about specific instances of sexism and suggests actions that can be taken in protest.

Through such initiatives the Third Wave Foundation aims to cultivate and support young feminist activists organizing in the name of a wide range of issues.

Riot Grrrl

Although it may seem far removed from the organized, straightforward nature of the Third Wave Foundation, Third Wave feminist agency is also in evidence when girls and women reclaim culture that has traditionally been used to slight them and transform it into a form of empowerment. Perhaps the most commonly cited and earliest example of the intersection of culture and feminism, is the movement called Riot Grrrl in which young women reclaimed a piece of the punk music scene and transformed it into a site of feminist expression. Born in the early 1990s, Riot Grrrl was a feminist response to the male domination of the punk music scene. Melissa Klein explains that girls involved in the punk scene began "to feel disenfranchised by their own supposedly 'alternative' community" (1997:211). Realizing that the boys were on stage and they were behind the scenes, girls began to question why "(they) did not get or give each other credit for the contributions (they) made and why toughness, anger and acts of rebellion (associated with the punk revolution) were considered a male province" (1997:212). Acknowledging

that the seeds of punk feminism²⁹ grew out of Second Wave accomplishments, including the establishment of women's studies courses, opportunities to volunteer at women's shelters and rape crisis hotlines, and demonstrate at pro-choice events. Klein describes her own experience as follows:

For me, the foreshadowing of my punk feminism was the frustration I felt when I would go out with my boyfriend, who was in a band, and other boys would come over, sit down without saying hello to me, and start talking to him about music and "the revolution," which was mainly one of aesthetics rather than politics. I began to wonder what was so damned revolutionary about staying up all night and combing your hair a certain way, when I had gotten up at four o'clock on a freezing January morning to hold hands with other women defending an (abortion clinic) . . . (Klein, 1997:212)

In the summer of 1991 the anger and questioning that had been brewing among these young women came to a head with the arrival of "angry grrrl" bands Bratmobile and Bikini Kill, and the transition from anger to action took place (Klein, 1997:213). With them came slogans such as "Revolution Girl Style Now", gatherings, and fanzines that reviewed bands and acted as a forum for girls to discuss political, emotional and sexual issues. With its most active chapters in Olympia and Washington DC, smaller Riot Grrrl chapters sprung up in a number of cities across the United States. While no formal organization or leadership existed to guide the movement, the lead singer of Bikini Kill, Kathleen Hannah, is often credited with coining the term "Riot Grrrl" (Orr, 1997:38).³⁰ A feminist reclamation of the word girl, "(t)he spelling of Grrrl is meant to subvert the image of girlhood innocence and evoke an angry grrrowl" (1997:38).

²⁹ The term "punk feminism" is used to refer to feminism associated with the Riot Grrrl movement, which involved first and primarily the establishment of a female punk music scene with women on stage and in the mosh pit. These women used the punk music scene as a venue to express feminist concerns and as a way to channel the anger they felt towards society – in this scene, women were allowed to be angry.

³⁰ Hannah is also known as the co-founder of Riot Grrrl Press, a non-profit printing and distribution service for underground female writers (Orr, 1997:38).

As we all know, when it is not being used to describe a women under sixteen, the word “girl” often takes on pejorative, infantilizing overtones, suggesting silliness, weakness or insubstantiality. “Grrrl” puts the growl back in our pussycat throats. “Grrrl” is intended to recall the naughty, confident and curious ten-year-olds we were before society made it clear it was time to stop being loud and playing with boys and concentrate on learning “to girl” . . . (Gilbert & Kile in Garrison, 2000:141)

Riot Grrrls banded together to brave the mosh pit at punk shows, used music lyrics as a form of consciousness-raising, and fought for equal access for women to the punk stage (Klein, 1997:214-215). According to Baumgardner and Richards, “Riot Grrrls weren’t pushing a rational femnism. They scrawled *slut* on their stomachs, screamed from stages and pages of fanzines about incest rape, being queer, and being in love” (2000:133).

Riot Grrrl provided a space in which young women could connect and express themselves. The punk shows, zines and conferences associated with the movement acted as sites or hubs in the formation of networks. The girls used these spaces not only to promote the female punk scene but to rant and rave, discuss issues that concerned them, relate their experiences with rape and abuse, and share their frustrations. Garrison explains the importance of Riot Grrrl as an early example of Third Wave feminism.

This movement encouraged young women to see themselves as producers and creators of knowledge, as verbal and expressive dissenters, rather than as passive consumers of U.S. culture or of the punk scene and youth subcultures they helped to define and shape. (Garrison, 2000:156)

The Riot Grrrl movement is often attributed with inspiring the birth of countless zines that have continued to thrive and inspire countless others, despite the apparent denouement of the Riot Grrrl movement in the mid-nineties. Klein suggests that “like other means of expression, (zines) embodied an attempt to process a wide variety of past and present images of femininity” (1997:213). Along these same lines, Orr notes that the

angry rhetoric and highly personal content combined to produce biting critiques of consumer culture and mainstream representations of girls and women in ads, on TV and in fashion magazines (Orr, 1997:38).

Girly Culture

The intersection of culture and feminism that underpins Riot Grrrl and the manner in which it challenges traditional notions of femininity is not limited to the punk scene. Baumgardner and Richards refer to broader instances of “this intersection of culture and feminism”, as the “Girly” phenomenon (2000:136). In a nutshell, Girly is about celebrating being a girl and girl culture without being a slave to patriarchy and capitalism. It is about instilling value and power in feminine things and rejecting the traditional notion that everything branded feminine or associated with the feminine are intrinsically weak, worthless or degrading. Girly culture can range from cute to crass: this reclamation of culture includes everything from the colour pink, nailpolish and Barbies, to women’s bodies, sexuality and pornography, to words such as bitch and slut. For example, according to the Girly phenomenon, “using make-up isn’t a sign of our sway to the marketplace and the male gaze; it can be sexy, campy, ironic, or simply decorating ourselves without the loaded issues”(2000:136); playing with Barbies was complex, imaginative and interesting, and not any less important than playing with

trucks; women can demystify and control soft-core porn images; the word bitch can be constructed as a compliment³¹.

Baumgardner and Richards also draw attention to the notion that Girlie is a clear challenge to the rigid recipe Second Wave feminists typically prescribed for achieving equality; it is the rebellion of daughter against mother.

In the same way that Betty Friedan's insistence on professional seriousness was a response to every woman in the office being called a girl, this generation is predestined to fight against the equally rigid stereotype of being too serious, too political, and seemingly asexual. Girlie culture is a rebellion against the false impression that since women don't want to be sexually exploited, they don't want to be sexual; against the necessity of brass-buttoned, red-suited seriousness to infiltrate a man's world; against the anachronistic belief that because women could be de-humanized by porn, they must be; and the idea that girls and power don't mix. (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000:137)

Girlie culture not only expands feminism but opens the possibilities of what can be feminine. It is a refreshing expression of feminism that calls for women to define their own versions of what is feminine and to indulge in their right to pleasure. It makes feminism relevant and acts as an effective point of connection between young feminists who do not feel that Second Wave tactics speak to their culture-saturated lives. However, it is essential that Girlie culture be paired with political consciousness and the understanding that social change requires action. With Girlie, there is danger that Spice Girls Pencil Set Syndrome will settle in: girls buy products created by male-owned

³¹ An example of the reclamation of the word bitch is its use as the title of an online publication or e-zine. The publishers of *Bitch* explain the choice of title as follows:

When it's being used as an insult "bitch" is most often hurled at women who speak their minds, who have opinions and don't shy away from expressing them. If being an outspoken woman means being bitchy, we'll take that as a compliment, thanks. Furthermore, if we take it as a compliment, it loses its power to hurt us. And if we can get people thinking about what they're saying when they use the word, that's even better.

companies that capture the slogan of feminism, without the power. Kathleen Hanna describes it this way: “. . . , I fear that . . . young girls will go buy their Spice Girls notebook and not go to the library to the gay or feminist bookstores” (in Baumgardner & Richards. 2000:161).

While the forms of activism engaged in by Third Wave feminists may not appear to be activist enough to Second Wave feminists, Alice Rossi argues that Third Wave feminism may in fact be laying the foundation for more public forms of activism in the future (Rossi in Heywood & Drake, 1997:4). Baumgardner and Richards are in agreement with Rossi and point out that political change, even incitement to political action, is typically the climax after a period of time. “(H)istory tells us that for each big leap. . . . there is a time of collecting energy and stating new visions – a time of pre-emergence” (Baumgardner& Richards. 2000:287). Perhaps the Third Wave could presently be considered more of a “swell” or “under current” than a forceful, clearly visible wave in the oceanography of the feminism.³² While feminism may currently lack wide visibility, it is there and building. At this time, the Third Wave appears to be focused more on networking and the sharing of ideas among girls and women at various sites of cultural production, such as zines, music production and in cyberspace. Baumgardner and Richards suggest that, like many movements before it, it may take some “galvanizing moment”, a shocking occurrence, to light a fire under the Third Wave (2000:287). The different look of Third Wave feminism, its “disparate” nature, “doesn’t mean that it’s not on the path to becoming an active movement (2000:289). For example,

³² The Oxford Dictionary defines “swell” as the “heaving of sea with waves that do not break”, and “undercurrent” as the “current below the surface” (1985:760, 823).

(a) woman who is working for abortion rights may seem to be working on a separate track from the Vibrator Vixen who is fighting for women to have as much sexual freedom as men enjoy. Yet at some point they realize that their tracks are parallel and heading towards the same destination – in this case, women's right to control their own bodies.

(Baumgardner & Richards, 2000:289)

The meeting of the two streams is also in evidence in hybrid publications that have emerged “from the space between established feminist journals or magazines and the more informal zine network” (Orr, 1997:39). Such a merger has produced publications with higher production values and a more consistent higher quality of writing (Ibid). In addition, many zines and hybrid publications have launched corresponding web sites or e-zines that allow them to maintain an interactive relationship with their audience. Orr concedes that while cyberspace may not be everyone's idea of a feminist community, it makes perfect sense and is in fact the venue of choice for some young women who are familiar with it (1997:39). These online spaces have yet to receive significant attention from feminist scholars.

With a general understanding of the Third Wave of feminism and its manifestation in various sites of cultural production the question arises: are women-centered e-zines representative of the Third Wave? If so, in what manner are they representative of the Third Wave? What is the mixture of Girlie and politics in e-zines? How is the networking and negotiation of contradictions and difference manifested in these spaces? I will return to these questions in the following chapter.

Internet as a Progressive Medium

There is hardly a book or edited volume about the Internet that does not include some reference to the debate over the Internet's potential as a progressive space that

serves to facilitate community and/or democracy. Proponents tout the technology's ability to connect many people at once around the world, the ease with which it both allows anyone online to become their own publisher, and provides access to vast amounts of information without being subject to the whims of traditional gate keepers. Critics, on the other hand, remind us that issues of access, privacy, and the increasing influence of commercial interests seriously undermine the democratic potential of the technology; it is certainly not inherently democratic. This section will discuss the Internet's potential for uniting virtual communities and serving as a democratic medium in further detail. It will also discuss the cyberfeminist perspective and its vision of using the Internet for furthering feminist interests.

Virtual Communities

The concept of community has evolved over time and in relation to different social conditions. Traditionally, the term 'community' most commonly referred to communities of place centered around family, neighborhood, church or school. The idea of place-based community may bring to mind the image of houses nestled close together, tidy lawns, strategically placed 'neighborhood watch' signs, and people who wave and say good morning or good evening when they pass in the street. However, the concept of community has also come to include the coming together of people as a matter of choice. Marilyn Friedman suggests industrialization and urbanization, which brought greater numbers of people into closer proximity, also allowed for greater opportunities for people with special interests, or belonging to small minority or ethnic groups to come together with people with like interests or backgrounds (Friedman, 1995:201). This coming together of people based on interests or similar backgrounds are considered communities

without propinquity or communities of 'choice'. As such, the definition of community has had its emphasis shift from locality to the relationships and interactions between those involved.

With the introduction of new communications technology, such as the Internet, some would argue that the concept of community is undergoing yet another significant shift. The Internet's unique capacity to enable many-to-many communication across space and time has inspired the expansion of the concept of community to include the virtual community. A virtual community may be created by the coming together of people in cyberspace via real-time online chat rooms, online mailing lists or by means of visiting websites with interactive features. They may even be able to see one another using webcams, which allow for the streaming of real-time video. The concept of the virtual community suggests that perhaps, as Thomas Bender intimated in his book *Community and Social Change in America*, community is better defined as an experience rather than a place (1978:6).

Perhaps the most well known proponent of the virtual community has been Howard Rheingold, author of *The Virtual Community* (1993). In this work, he argued that the convergence of computer and telecommunications technology enabled significant connections to be made between people in cyberspace: connections that formed a new public realm. He related his own experiences of virtual community, including the mutual support that was offered, the sharing of information that took place among community members, and how a community could be mobilized to action when one of their own was facing difficulty. Rheingold and others have touted the many advantages of people coming together to form communities online. For example, similar to the effect of

urbanization, the international reach of the Internet gives users access to a much greater number of people and, therefore, an enormous range of topics of interest. It is also suggested that the absence of social cues, such as voice inflections, body language, indicators of race or gender, etc., provide the potential for equality in cyberspace (Fredrick, 1999:187). Ideally, people would not be judged based on cues given by their appearance or mannerisms but only on the value of their contributions, their words. Additionally, the virtual community is seen as a viable and valuable source of social interaction for people who find it difficult to leave their homes to interact with others due to physical disability or other limitations.

Feminist research has shown that under many circumstances women form communities of their own to cope or mobilize against oppressive circumstances (Abu-Lughod, 1995; Honig, 1995; Bart, 1995; Brown, 1995; Avery, 1995; Ringelheim, 1995; and Shugar, 1995)³³. On the most basic level, Gillian Youngs contends that “shared reactions and circumstances can (strengthen one’s ability) to take their own thinking further, to cope better with their conditions of existence and to reach out to others in similar circumstances” (Youngs, 1999:62). In Penny Weiss’s words,

There are cracks in patriarchy, and women’s communities have lived in those spaces, have pushed back the borders, and have even done the hammering and chiseling to create and widen them.
(Weiss, 1995:11)

³³ These communities can be place-based, such as in Lila Abu-Lughod’s account of the lives of Muslim Bedouin women located throughout the coastal region of the Egyptian Western Desert (1995:21-44), in Emily Honig’s article about the communities of women in Shanghai cotton mills (1995:59-76), or Joan Ringelheim’s review of women in concentration camps during the Holocaust (1995:317-340). Or women-centered communities can be communities of choice based on a mutual interest or cause such as the Jane Abortion Collective (Bart, 1995:105-124), The Furies Collective (Brown, 1995:125-134), the National Black Women’s Health Project (Avery, 1995:147-154) and lesbian feminist separatist communities (Shugar, 1995).

In fact, women-centered communities are seen as having been key to feminist movements over the years. Estelle Freedman argues that the First Wave of feminism, which culminated in the suffrage movement, began and gained the necessary momentum through the formation of women-centered communities beginning with the General Federation of Women's Clubs in 1890 (1995:90). With over one million members by 1910, these clubs drew women interested in social and literacy activities but soon had them launching civic reform programs.³⁴ Other women-centered groups and institutions, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the first female professionals emerging from women's colleges, were also strong supporters of the suffrage movement. Freedman concludes that the decline of the feminist movement in the 1920s, following the Suffrage Amendment, can be attributed to a decline and devaluing of women-centered groups and institutions.

When women tried to assimilate into male-dominated institutions, without securing feminist social, economic, or political bases, they lost the momentum and the networks which made the suffrage movement possible. (Freedman, 1995:98)

Shugar documents the rise of the women's community and separatist feminist politics of the Second Wave in *Sep-a-ra-tism and Women's Community* (1995). She identifies white women's negative experience with Leftist movements, such as the civil rights, anti-war and student movements, as providing the central impetus for the development of women-centered groups and communities united against sexism.³⁵

When women first began to discuss the issue of sexism within the Movement, they sought and encouraged open dialogue with

³⁴ Freedman notes that "(t)he clubs reflected the societal racism of the time, however, and black women founded the National Association of Coloured Women in 1896" (1995:91).

³⁵ It must be noted that Shugar specifies white women. The emphasis placed on sexism posed a problem for women of color, working class women and lesbians who had to contend with other forms of oppression.

Movement men. But as their attempts were continually thwarted, women began to demand and create separate spaces where they could meet without the presence of male anger and interference. (Shugar, 1995:13)

Such experiences inspired not only female communities that served as safe spaces for women to organize and plan, but also the development of more extreme separatist strategies by radical feminists (Shugar, 1995:13, 15).

According to Ann Ferguson, communities that are formed in resistance to dominant structures, such as patriarchy, serve an essential function (1995:372). She refers to them as “oppositional communities” and proposes the following:

Such communities are attempts to partially realize some of our ideals in the present as we struggle to change the world in the future. They are spaces in which we can both empower and strengthen ourselves to struggle against those who wish to maintain the status quo outside of this space. (Ferguson, 1995:372)

She explains that oppositional communities serve as spaces in which members attempt to reclaim and “redefine their gender, racial, ethnic or sexual identities so as to eliminate the negative implications hitherto associated with them”. Additionally, Patricia Wise points out that networking, even if it takes the more casual form of socializing or gossiping, is one way in which valuable counter cultures maintain their existence.

There may be value in thinking about the more powerful thing of gossiping – of maintaining underground cultures of connection through powerful ‘talk’ with ‘gossips’ (or friends) – which can constitute, as it always has, a crucial counter-cultural network of support and solidarity. (Wise, 1998:188)

The knowledge of feminists’ previous establishment of communities and the potential for virtual communities made possible by the Internet raises interesting questions regarding whether or not women are making use of the Internet in the interests

of feminism. The combination of the interactive nature of women-centered e-zines and their connections to Third Wave feminism positions them to facilitate online feminist communities and act as spaces for Third Wave feminists to discuss and organize. Are they serving this function for participants? If so, how and what kinds of communities are emerging from women-centered e-zines? Are these feminist communities?

It is important to note that the notion of a virtual community has been subject to a number of criticisms. In fact, whether or not groups of people coming together with similar interests and/or backgrounds and forming support networks online is, in fact, tantamount to a community is a matter of debate centering over what exactly defines a community. Some critics would argue that a community involves a genuine coming together of people in actual spaces to engage with one another, to debate and plan, and share the spirit of human interaction (Mosco, 1998:60; Haywood, 1998:27-28). Proponents of virtual communities would no doubt retort that this is exactly what happens online excepting that the space in which it occurs is cyberspace. It has also been suggested that the idea of virtual communities is detrimental to place-based communities (Haywood, 1998:28).³⁶ Further criticism focuses on the proclaimed advantages of the virtual community. While it is accepted that the Internet is capable of connecting people across time and space and possesses the unique capacity for many-to-many communication, the majority of the world's population does not have access to the Internet and its abilities. Additionally, the absence of social cues does not mean people

³⁶ Haywood suggests that increasing connection through electronic networks may yield a movement towards a more privatized social world wherein participants become secluded and isolated from their immediate surroundings (Haywood, 1998:28). He posits that it is from our first hand experiences and observations in our immediate surroundings that we gain an understanding of the conditions of others around us and how we might be able to effect change. In turn, it may be more difficult to translate online discussion into action in the real world when we are unfamiliar with our surroundings.

are not interested in finding out details about the person with whom they are communicating. At the same time, one can never be sure with whom one is actually interacting.

Online Democracy

For some, the Internet not only provides access to a new type of community, but also has the potential for democratic empowerment (Rheingold, 1993; Gurak, 1997; Delli Carpini, 2000). Such claims are often based on the Internet's potential to enable Jurgen Habermas' ideal of a "public sphere". According to Habermas, the ideal public sphere is "a discursive arena that is home to citizen debate, deliberation, agreement and action" (Villa, 1992:712). This discursive arena is located outside of the realm of government and the economy and has as its tenets freedom and equality: the freedom to speak one's mind and question others as a peer. Mark Poster points out that while Habermas' ideal bourgeois public sphere has been subject to many criticisms, the concept of the public sphere inevitably underlies any reconception of democracy (Poster, 1995).

In evaluating the Internet's potential as an electronic democratic medium, Michael Delli Carpini argues that many of its characteristics, which differentiate it from traditional media, also suggest it has the potential to support something akin to a public sphere. He lists these characteristics as follows:

In particular, the new media environment (a) increases the speed with which information can be gathered and transmitted, (b) increases the volume of information that is easily accessible, (c) creates greater flexibility in terms of when information is accessed, (d) provides greater opportunity and mixes of interactivity (one to one, one to many, many to one, and many to many), (e) shifts the nature of community from geographic to interest based, (f) blurs distinctions between types of media (print, visual, and audio), (g) challenges traditional definitions of information gatekeepers and

authoritative voices, and (h) challenges traditional definitions of producers and consumers of information. (Carpini, 2000:346)

In other words, the Internet's potential to facilitate democracy is located primarily in its ability to provide access to information and enable equal participation in cultural discourse. Access to a wide range of information is necessary for citizens to make informed decisions and assume informed political positions. With even a limited amount of skill, the Internet user can not only gather information but can also become a disseminator of information in the same space as established institutions. However, Internet users do not all participate in a single forum at once, and instead group together around specific interests or issues in newsgroups, chat rooms and on websites. Perhaps the Internet lends itself more to Nancy Fraser's conception of a multiplicity of public spheres, including what she calls subaltern counter publics formed by subordinate or otherwise oppressed groups (Fraser, 1993). Ideally, individuals would bring ideas formed in one public sphere to another due to the ease with which they could gather information and participate in any number of spheres online.

Rheingold offered examples of CMC democracy in action in his chapter entitled "Electronic Frontiers and Online Activists". One such example related the way in which online networking culminated in the founding of the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), an organization that rallied to protect the rights of electronic speech and assembly.³⁷ In *Persuasion and Privacy in Cyberspace* Laura Gurak documents two instances in which the Internet became the organizing and mobilizing site of successful

³⁷ The EFF's first undertaking involved defending a group of hackers who had been the subjects of a FBI crackdown. For a detailed account of the happenings around this case see Rheingold, 1996:251-260.

online campaigns to defeat government and corporate initiatives that were thought to be invasions of privacy (1997).³⁸

Yet, the argument that the Internet has the potential to enable a democratic public sphere is not without its challenges. Michael X. Delli Carpini makes the case that people's *willingness* to engage with the Internet as a democratic tool must be taken into consideration. He proposes that while the Internet will serve *political elites* and *engaged citizens* well in their civic pursuits, and may indeed prove effective for reaching *interested but inactive citizens*, the same assumption cannot be made for the group he refers to as *neither engaged nor clearly motivated individuals* (Carpini, 2000:347-348).³⁹ It is certainly not the case that Internet access automatically instills political motivation in a user. Along these lines, Kevin Hill and John Hughes' study of online activism found that "Internet activists"⁴⁰ are generally more politically active in the real world than the general public (1998:36).

Online democracy faces many other challenges from critics. Perhaps the most potent of these is the previously mentioned issue of who does, and does not, have access

³⁸ According to Gurak, in 1990, debates, discussions and online petitions erupted with the news of the Lotus Development Corporation's intentions to launch the database software Marketplace: Households. The direct mail marketing database for personal computers was to contain the names, addresses, and spending habits of 120 million American consumers. An online ruckus ensued and concern over privacy issues resulted in thirty thousand people requesting that they be removed from the list. The product was never released. Again in 1993, with the federal proposal of Clipper encryption technology, the Internet became a hotbed of debate and action. Free speech and privacy advocates were opposed to the government's proposed ownership of the encryption algorithm, or decoding key, and used the Internet to spread their discontent along with technical information in online discussions, newsgroups, and a petition drive. The Clipper chip proposal was defeated.

³⁹ Carpini's grouping of actual or potential civic actors is as follows: *political elite* includes candidates, officeholders, organized interests, nonprofits and the media; *engaged citizens* refers to those who are politically active and the last two, *interested but inactive citizens* and *neither engaged nor motivated individuals*, are self explanatory.

⁴⁰ Hill and Hughes determined whether or not their research subjects could be considered "Internet activists" based on a scaled variable composed of two questions: "Do you ever engage in on-line discussion about politics or engage in political activity on-line?" and "Have you ever expressed an opinion about a political or social issue to a bulletin board, on-line newsgroup, or e-mail list?"

to the technology. Other criticisms point to the potential for surveillance the Internet provides (humdog, 1996:439). Under a number of circumstances, such as in chat rooms and with mailing lists, anyone may read what you have to say, or monitor your opinions and the groups with which you associate. Additionally, although the Clipper chip was defeated, packet sniffing technology such as the FBI's Carnivore means that the potential for surveillance may be greater than most people think.⁴¹ On another level, although access to information has been praised as a liberating element of the Internet, it also has been seen as problematic. For one, it is difficult to gauge the credibility of information online (Rheingold, 1993:267). Additionally, the sheer magnitude of material on the Internet is said to "create a dearth of attention" (Gutstein, 1999:283). In other words there is so much available, a great deal of which is simply noise, that people may actually lose motivation for their search for knowledge. Not only might they lose interest in their search, but as Renate Klein points out, "(t)he millions of 'bytes' floating around in cyberspace do not, emphatically not, constitute knowledge, nor do they all hold the same weight" (1999:194). She adds that access to information does not come neatly packaged with genuine understanding, contextualization, or critical analytical skills, all necessary ingredients for processing information as knowledge.

Critics have also pointed to the increasing hold commercial interests have on the Internet and argue that it works against any democratic potential. Some even suggest that the Internet is on the brink of corporate control.

⁴¹ The FBI can install the packet sniffer Carnivore in an ISP data center to have it snoop essentially all data flowing through the network (Tyson, 2001). Carnivore has the ability to monitor a user's online activities, such as which Web sites they visit, what they look at on the site, whom they send e-mail to, what's in the e-mail they send, and what they download from a site (ibid). Although the data of many other uninvolved people on the Net may flow through the Carnivore system, the FBI claims that the privacy of this data will not be compromised. None the less, the potential for surveillance is there.

Yes, amateurs, educators, and computer hackers, the contemporary version of the mythological trickster, continue to ride the (Internet) at little or no cost, creating furrowed brows in the executive suites. But it is just a matter of time, critics contend, before a handful of transnational companies takes near complete control of the (Internet) and its product. The early warning signs, such as Internet advertising, shopping, banking, access fees, tightening security controls, and the explosion of "firewall-protected" intranets point to the inevitable victory of the market over democratic communication. (Mosco, 1998:60)

Increasingly, a handful of large corporations, some growing larger through mergers, (see America Online and Time Warner)⁴², have control over what people have access to online and how much they pay for that access.⁴³ As such, Vincent Mosco warns, a growing division between those who have access to all the technology has to offer and those that do not is more likely to emerge than the ultimate democratic medium (Mosco, 1998:60).

Mosco suggests that the faith held by some regarding the potential of computer communication to foster community and democracy is reminiscent of myths that have surrounded the emergence of new technologies throughout history (Mosco, 1998:57). In fact, the very same promises associated with computer mediated communication, such as

⁴² The merger of America Online, Inc. and Time Warner Inc. marked the first, and potentially most significant convergence of an Internet giant with a media, entertainment and cable conglomerate. Together the reach of these companies encompasses content, consumer interface and delivery, thereby having significant influence on what people have access to and how much they pay for it.

⁴³ While users are able to produce their own content and be active in online discussions and debates, commercial interests have flooded the Internet with advertising and commercial sites, at times veiled under a thin layer of information. Finding information can be an exercise in frustration when one must weed out sites of genuine interest among hundreds of commercial sites. Companies can even pay a search engine to have a link to their site appear first in a list when certain key words are entered in a search (see online the search engine Google's "Advertise with us – Premium Sponsorship links"). While this service may be used by anyone, those with commercial interests are more likely to possess both the means and motivation. It has been suggested that this practice skews search results and Jakob Nielsen, co-founder of the Nielsen Norman Group, a Mountain View company that studies the usability of technology, says that as a result of pursuing profit, "(search engine portals) have been failing in their core mission of helping people find things" (in Janah, 1999, 15 August).

the Internet. accompanied the birth of wireless communication in the 1920s and were subsequently squashed.

Emboldened by their new invention, (amateur enthusiasts and educators) also felt the allure of virtual community and popular power. How could any material force get in the way of invisible messages traveling through the ether? But, the critics remind us, a lot got in the way of their dreams of democratic community. Once business figured out that they could make money selling the ether or, more specifically, selling radio audiences to advertisers . . . they pressured governments to open radio to commerce. These same governments quickly recognized the power of the new technology and either took complete control or shared it with business, leaving amateurs and educators, and other pioneers with little. (Mosco, 1998:58).

Mosco recommends that “the key to a useful response to computer communications. . . . is to recognize that it is less than its enthusiasts make it out to be and more than rejectionists maintain” (1998:61). It is important to note that the Internet is a tool that, when used effectively, can open possibilities for community and democratic action; it is not the technology itself but what it allows motivated users to undertake.

If the Internet indeed has the potential to be a democratizing medium, the question arises as to whether or not women-centered e-zines are taking advantage of the opportunities it presents to further feminist interests? If so, how? Are women-centered e-zines sites of free and equal discussion and debate, for the sharing of information and opinions, and for organizing and mobilizing for political action? These questions will be addressed in the following chapters.

Cyberfeminist Approach

"Feminism" (or more properly, "feminisms") has been understood as a historical -- and contemporary -- transnational movement for justice and freedom for women, which depends on women's activist participation in networked local, national, and international groups. . . Link this with "cyber," which means to steer, govern, control, and we conjure up the staggering possibility of feminism at the electronic helm. (Wilding, 1998)

While Wilding's projection in this quote may seem overly ambitious, on a basic level cyberfeminism touts the Internet as a progressive technology that has the potential to serve feminist interests in a technological society. Cyberfeminism is Third Wave feminism: it can be as varied and diverse as the women who embrace the Internet as a means to feminist ends.

At the very radical end of the spectrum, Cyberfeminist discourse involves an alliance between women and machines in a utopian revolt against men and the patriarchal structures that grant men dominance over both women and machines. The perceived potential of this new affinity between women and technology, made possible by the emergence of new information and communication technology, is proposed by Sadie Plant:

New technologies will destabilize masculine dominance by reducing men to the status of mere "users" in the face of a cybernetic world that is non-linear, self-replicating, self-organizing, and self-designing. (Plant in Stewart Millar, 1998, p. 59)

This vein of cyberfeminism puts enormous stock in the potential of the Internet to subvert traditional power imbalances, and suggests that women are uniquely suited to thrive in the new information economy (Plant in Stewart Millar, 1998, p. 58). First, women are considered to be proficient and eager communicators, a key skill required for the

effective and productive use of ICTs .⁴⁴ Second, success in the Information Age is not dependent on physical strength . Further,

(w)omen are also well versed in role-playing and imitation, which makes them good candidates for the virtual worlds of the future. In addition, women's ability to adapt to changes in the workplace makes them ideally suited to the emerging world of part-time, discontinuous work. (Plant in Stewart Millar p.58-59)

The idea that the Internet will provide a vehicle for revolt, or otherwise enable an opportunity for the disruption of the entrenched power structures is echoed in the "Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century" issued by VNS Matrix: ". . . we are the virus of the new world disorder/rupturing the symbolic from within/saboteurs of big daddy mainframe/the clitoris is a direct line to the matrix/ . . ./infiltrating disrupting disseminating/corrupting the discourse" (VSN Matrix). Active from 1991 until 1997, VNS Matrix was a group of Australian female artists who, along with Sadie Plant, coined the term cyberfeminism. They generated electronic art works and installations that integrated theory with popular culture and believed that by "hijacking the tools of domination", or "high technology", those tools could be diverted from the purpose of maintaining the current power imbalance. Once infiltrated, high technology would become the source of "new uncolonised and inherently radical spaces for the exchange of ideas and information, and cultural expression".

More moderate cyberfeminist perspectives see the Internet as having the potential to empower feminists and further feminist interests in a variety of different ways, based on its potential as a democratic communications medium and its ability to connect people

⁴⁴ Charlton has speculated that the greatest draw to the Internet for women is in fact its capacity for communication (1999, p. 395).

and communities across time and space. As such, the Internet is an ideal source of information and resources women can access independently, anonymously and relatively inexpensively on topics that may not be easily available otherwise, or may be considered private or embarrassing. For example, women and girls need access to resources concerning contraception, unexpected pregnancy, rape, sexual assault or harassment, domestic abuse, anorexia, questioning sexual orientation, depression, low-income housing, finding work, information on sexism or racism in the workplace, and many more topics. The Internet is also a far reaching and relatively low cost means for feminists to organize, build networks and communicate with and among members of specific organizations. Such communications can facilitate organizing for activism and lobbying, and give women a voice. According to Patricia Wise, the Internet is an ideal space for the pursuit of feminist interests because it allows people to come together around specific political interests or initiatives, regardless of real world affiliations, and may aid in negotiations of difference and contradiction required by the Third Wave (1998). In the following passage Wise points out the ways in which cyberspace is ideal for playing a role in the development of new alliances between feminisms and the construction of new feminist strategies.

Interventions in cyberspace might include fashioning various political, academic or creative affinity groups. Difference will find different means and expressions. Strategies will emerge which enable various ethics, ideological projects, political actions, theoretical analyses, creative productions, intertextual experiments, cross-media excursions, feminist virtual reality parlours and feminist teledildonics, for that matter. To think all the same about or do the same with cyberspace and virtual reality would be a rerun of the well-meaning projects of liberation feminism before feminists came to terms with the constant problematics of difference. (Wise, 1998:192-193)

However, a range of other considerations must temper discussions and predictions of the Internet's usefulness to feminisms. For instance, Faith Wilding draws attention to the notion of "net utopianism" with which many cyberfeminists align themselves. Net utopianism celebrates the Internet as being unlike any other technology, enabling users to leave their bodies behind to engage in a non-hierarchical space, and thereby allowing women to connect, network and mobilize beyond the confines of patriarchal dominance.

However, Wilding warns that

it is of utmost importance to recognize that the new media exist within a social framework that is already established in its practices and embedded in economic, political, and cultural environments that are still deeply sexist and racist. Contrary to the dreams of many net utopians, the Net does not automatically obliterate hierarchies through free exchanges of information across boundaries. (Wilding, 1998)

Her comments serve as reminders that the Internet was created by and for the military, is being increasingly encroached upon by commercial interests, has been dominated until very recently by Westerners and men and continues to be dominated by the English language, and is used heavily by the sex industry. Additionally, there are countries across the world in which many people have never made a phone call, let alone had the opportunity to log on. With this being the case, there is inevitably a problem with the range of interests that may be addressed by those who have access to the Internet. Not only do many women not have the opportunity to access new information and communication technologies, but there are those whose experience of such technologies is very different. For women who may face exploitative conditions as the assemblers of high tech equipment and computers, cyberfeminism has little relevance to their existence

(Stewart-Millar, 1998:62). These conditions must be acknowledged and taken into account when inserting feminism into the online environment.

Wilding also identifies as problematic a certain ambivalence within “cybergrrl-ism,” an online expression of feminism that draws on the notion of cultural reclamation and redefinition, such as that engaged in by the Riot Grrrl movement. One of the most popular forms of feminist expression on the Internet, “grrl” groups commonly adopt a ‘by women for women’ approach to feminist rebellion. While online “grrl” groups may be held up as “manifestations of new subjective and cultural feminine representations”, Wilding indicates that they seem reluctant to engage politically.

Despite the gripings against men in general, which pervade some of the discussions and sites, most cybergrrls don't seem interested in engaging in a political critique of women's position on the Net – instead they adopt the somewhat anti-theory attitude which seems to prevail currently; they'd rather forge ahead to express their ideas directly in their art and interactive practices. (Wilding, 1998)

Additionally, cybergrrls often reproduce and promote “sexist and stereotyped images of women from popular media – the buxom gun moll, the supersexed cyborg femme, and the 50's tupperware cartoon women are favorites -- without any analysis or critical recontextualization” (1998). According to Wilding cybergrrl activities on their own are not enough to effect significant change, but in combination with political theory and practice there are considerable possibilities waiting to be exploited.

Despite such criticisms, cyberfeminism acknowledges and celebrates women's abilities and strengths to engage with Internet technology and use it to serve feminist interests. As such, cyberfeminism effectively “resists replicating patriarchal constructions of women as technologically incompetent beings who are exiled from the

world of technology” (Stewart Millar, 1998:59). Do women-centered ezines take advantage of the Internet’s unique capacities for communication to further the interests of feminisms by providing a space where valuable information may be accessed, networks are built, organizing for political action takes place, and women are given a voice? Do they construct the Internet as a technology of empowerment for women?

What are Zines and Ezines?

Zines as Counterhegemonic Culture

Zines are amateur publications created and distributed on a small scale by a single person or small group of people. They are often photocopied pages stapled together and very personal in content and style. In his studies of zines, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (1997), Stephen Duncombe traces the roots of zines back to science fiction (SF) fanzines circulated by SF fanclubs as early as the 1930s (1997:6). These fanzines acted as a vehicle for members of the SF subculture to share stories, make critical commentary and communicate with people with similar interests. Seth Friedman notes that the availability of the mimeograph duplicating machine fueled the production of hundreds, if not thousands, of sci-fi fanzines throughout the 1930s, 40s and 50s (Friedman, 1997). Likewise, Friedman suggests, the political unrest and availability of inexpensive offset printing in the 1960s combined to produce a boom in alternative publishing that included political commentary, literary experimentation, and rock and roll critiques. As this rebellious voice was swallowed by the mainstream, a new underground was poised to emerge. The 1970s saw the arrival of punk rock and with it the rebirth of the fanzine to promote punk music and the punk scene, as it was largely ignored by the mainstream music press (Duncombe, 1997:7)

With the Xerox machine firmly established as an inexpensive and easily accessible mode of reproduction in the 1980s, this do-it-yourself medium was adopted by a much wider range of people wishing to express themselves (Friedman, 1997).

Duncombe explains the emergence of zines as they are known today as follows:

In the early 1980s these two tributaries (SF and punk fanzines), joined by smaller streams of publications created by fans of other cultural genres, disgruntled self-publishers, and the remnants of printed political dissent from the sixties and seventies, were brought together and cross-fertilized through listings and reviews in network zines like *Factsheet Five*⁴⁵. (Duncombe, 1997:7)

At this point, Duncombe notes, the prefix “fan” was basically dropped and “zine” has since been used to refer to this do-it-yourself medium.

As they now exist, zines possess a number of characteristics that clearly distinguish them from mainstream media. Frederick Wright highlights these characteristics in his dissertation, *From Zines to Ezines: Electronic Publishing and the Literary Underground* (August, 2001). First, zines are highly personal in nature (Wright, 2001:47). Given that zines are most often the site of personal expression, Wright suggests that zines are comparable to a form of personal communication between writer and reader, as opposed to the slick, impersonal nature of mainstream magazines. Second, zines differ from the mainstream in subject matter (2001:50). They serve interests and subcultures that are not addressed by mainstream media due to, for example, their lack of appeal to advertisers, outrageousness, or underground nature, which tends to reject the mainstream media to the same extent as it is ignored by the mainstream. Third, zines are

⁴⁵ *Factsheet Five* is perhaps the most well known of the network zines, reviewing hundreds of zines on a regular basis, listing titles, producers, addresses and a short description of the zines' content. As such it links diverse zines as a common medium.

subject to erratic publishing practices. A zine may be published regularly, only once or very irregularly, they survive at the whim of the zine publisher and are not governed or influenced in any manner by the publishing industry. Likewise, the distribution channels for zines avoid the grand structures of the publishing industry and instead zines are distributed through networks, alternative libraries, distributors and stores arranged and developed by the zine community (2001:51). A fourth characteristic that differentiates zines from the mainstream media is their appearance. The design of a zine is often an array of cut and paste collages unified by the photocopier. Although some can be attractive and demonstrate the good design sense of their publishers, it quickly becomes clear that other publishers are less concerned with appearance than making a statement or getting a message across. Fifth, and perhaps one of the most important characteristics of zines, is their noncommercial ethos (2001:52). Wright explains:

The art and writing exhibited in zines express opinions, ideas, and thoughts of all kinds, whether they offend the sensibilities of others or not (of course some zines intend to offend). Other communication media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television often water down extremes of thought and opinion because their presentation might undermine commercial aims (and public and college media often face similar pressures, if not from sponsors then from bureaucrats) by alienating advertisers and readers, but zines have no such limitations because they are essentially non-commercial enterprises. (Wright, 2001:52)

In other words, zines do not have to be concerned about the interests of advertisers or a target market because they are not intended to make a profit, only to serve as an unhindered outlet for personal expression. In fact, most zine publishers prefer to trade their zines with others rather than sell them, even at a very low price. Duncombe suggests that

(w)hile other media are produced for money or prestige or public approval, zines are done . . . for *love*: love of expression, love of sharing, love of communication. And in protest against a culture and society that offers little reward for such acts of love, zines are also created out of *rage*. (Duncombe, 1997:15)

A sixth and final characteristic of zines highlighted by Wright, is the use of affordable and available technology to produce them (2001:53). Due to the fact that zines are not produced for profit, their publishers seek out the cheapest available means to reproduce their publications. Early sci-fi fanzine producers took advantage of the mimeograph, and around the middle of the twentieth century offset printing technology, which is still used for larger print runs sometimes. Since the 1980s, the photocopier has become the reproducer of choice either at the corner copy shop or on the sly in the workplace. In fact, it has been argued that a boom in zine publishing in the 1980s was directly related to the wide availability of the photocopier (Gunderloy & Janice in Wright, 2001:54).

In recent years, zine producers have taken to publishing electronically over the Internet. These electronic versions of the hardcopy zine are most often referred to as ezines. This new manner of publication has both advantages and drawbacks. As a publishing medium, the Internet has great reach, as basically anyone with Internet access is a potential consumer of online content. Additionally, as a communications medium, the Internet holds the potential for interactivity both between the publisher and readers or users, and among the readers/users. The drawbacks of the Internet include the fact that the equipment and services necessary for Internet connectivity can be costly, as well one must have the time and skills necessary to create a website to publish online. This means

that, while ezines have the potential to reach a great many people internationally, they are not easily accessible to those who do not have Internet access.

Whereas at one time, one might have been able to construct a profile of the zine producer - i.e. white, middle class young people who have adopted what Duncombe refers to as "'careers' of deviance"⁴⁶ - it is not so simple anymore (1997:8). As the number of zines has grown over the years so has the diversity of producers and the content published. They are young/old, male/female, working class/middle class, and from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. What *can* be said about the producers of zines is that they are people who do not have access to voicing their opinions in the mainstream press, do not see their voices or opinions represented in the mainstream and generally fall outside dominant culture, either because they have rejected the status quo, or because they have been rejected by it.

Duncombe suggests that zines "offer a way to reject definitions given by the dominant society and replace them with one's own, a way of 'taking over the means of production in order to create (one's) own meanings'" (Duncombe, 1997:67). Melissa Klein argues that the production of zines, and the "do it yourself" philosophy that drives them, is cathartic and enables people who may feel invisible to achieve some form of visibility (1997:217). In Klein's word's, "It is the pounding of the fist on the table, claiming, 'I exist, I exist'" (1997:217). Employing zine networks as a means to self-expression and for sharing ideas and information has been adopted by many groups who

⁴⁶ Duncombe describes "'careers' of deviance" as follows: "embracing downwardly mobile career aspirations, unpopular music and literary tastes, transgressive ideas about sexuality, unorthodox artistic sensibilities, and a politics resolutely outside the status quo (more often to the left but sometimes to the right)". (Duncombe, 1997:8)

have not seen themselves reflected in the mainstream. Gay, lesbian, bi, and queer oriented zines, have proliferated, as well as those by women of colour, though perhaps to a lesser extent. According to Duncombe, zines are a “recent entry in a long line of media for the misbegotten”, including Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* pamphlets and those of other radicals, the underground press of the 1960s and hip-hop subculture’s rap.

The political nature of zines is a matter of debate. It has been proposed that the very act of publishing a zine, in which the publisher takes on the role of a creator of culture rather than merely a consumer of culture, is a political act in and of itself (Clark, 2001, June). For Duncombe, the degree to which zines are in fact political is slightly more complex. He suggests that alternative culture, exemplified by zines, is a manifestation of Antonio Gramsci’s vision of *counterhegemonic culture*: “a culture arising out of dissent and providing a countervision of society” (1997:175). Gramsci identified counterhegemonic culture as having the potential for political resistance, but as Duncombe explains, counterhegemonic culture was only one important ingredient towards political change.

While he believed that counterhegemonic culture was essential, and that an attack on capitalist culture must accompany, and in some ways preface, the project of changing the material relations of society, culture was not enough for Gramsci. Changes in culture and consciousness had to be linked to a political program and political organization and result in real changes in the physical nature of the economic system. (Duncombe, 1997:176)

As a form of counterhegemonic culture, Duncombe continues, zines are more likely to fall into the category of *pre-political* than *political* movements, a distinction made by historian Eric Hobsbawn (1997:176). This distinction is described as follows;

Political movements have organization, ideology, and will to effect political change. Pre-political movements – . . . – are made up of “people who have not yet found, or only begun to find, a specific language in which to express their aspirations about the world” – but they are groups which have revolutionary potential. They also have something that more formal, “political” groups can sometimes lack: a close connection to lived experience. (Duncombe, 1997:176)

As a space “to test out new ideas and to imagine a different way of ordering things”, zines can act as a stepping stone to political action (Duncombe, 1997:179-181). They function as a consciousness-raising tool not only for individuals who are involved in various movements but also those who are not “by encouraging readers to think about who they are and what they believe in” (1997:181). The effectiveness of zines to inspire people to think about their situation in life and that of others, and what they would like to see change may be found in the genuineness of the publications. Hilary Clark suggests that “zines speak to what’s happening in peoples lives, what they see around them, what’s happening to their friends, their community, their futures” (2001, June). She argues that in contrast to the shiny magazines featuring skinny models and 50 tips about how to please ones’ lover, or newspaper headlines that proclaim “Canada rated the number one country to live in!”, people may find zines more relevant to what is going on in their lives. It is in this process of sharing information, expressing emotions and finding community that Clark locates the genesis of political action.

Duncombe reminds us that, in the same manner that zines and underground culture may act as a stepping stone for engaging with Leftist politics, ideas expressed in these arenas may also serve as spawning beds for the Right (1997:183). He also cautions that some people never venture beyond the underground; they may set up permanent residence or merely visit occasionally in an effort to escape the real world.

What are Ezines?

In the most general sense, ezines are online versions of print zines. The electronic versions of this do-it-yourself medium exhibit many of the same characteristics as print zines, including some of those identified by Frederick Wright and reviewed in the earlier section on zines. First, like their print medium counterparts, ezines are very personal in nature and tend to reflect views and interests that are not represented in the mainstream. Produced by one individual, or a small group, sometimes with help from outside contributors, the content of ezines often relates personal opinions and experiences in the form of essays, poems, cartoons, rants, commentary, etc.

Second, the publishing practices associated with ezines also resemble those of print zines in their tendency to be erratic. An ezine may be updated regularly, irregularly, or remain static in its last incarnation indefinitely. However, the manner of publishing and distribution are where the differences between print zines and ezines begin to emerge. A significant difference between zines and ezines is that, even when it is no longer being published, a print zine still exists through the hard copies that remain in circulation or in collections. An ezine, on the other hand, can disappear entirely without a trace. Once a website is discontinued, or taken offline by the publisher, there is literally no record of it in cyberspace. Even past "issues" of an ezine disappear each time it is updated unless they are archived by the publisher. Although it is possible for Internet users to download and save the content of ezines, significant features such as the interactivity and linking capabilities of the original are lost. Erratic publishing practices combined with the intangible nature of cyberspace can make studying ezines a frustrating

endeavor.⁴⁷ It also means that a study such as this cannot necessarily be repeated, given that a month or two from this time the ezines that were consulted and analyzed may have disappeared.

A third way in which ezines differ from print zines is that, although they also operate below the radar of the “grand structures of the publishing industry,” their systems of distribution do not rely on traditional zine distribution networks. Instead, they take advantage of the capacity for many-to-many communication enabled by the Internet. As such, the potential audience for an ezine is much greater than that of a print zine, whose audience often must make a specific request to the publisher for a copy; the ezine can be accessed online without incurring mailing costs or a lag time for delivery. In addition, the ability to establish web links from one ezine to another enables the formation of an online network among ezines and expands the ease of accessibility to a range of similar or associated ezines. While the potential audience for ezines may be greater, it must also be acknowledged that it is also limited to those who have access to the Internet. Likewise, the ability to publish an ezine is limited to those who have access to both the technology and the technical knowledge required. Print zines, on the other hand, are accessible to anyone with a pen, paper, a stamp and the knowledge about where to send a request.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ I experienced this frustration first hand during the course of my research. A number of ezines I had enlisted as interesting examples of women-centered ezines at the outset of this study had disappeared, with no recourse to accessing even archived issues, by the time I was ready to analyze them in more detail. One of these, *FaT GiRL*, “the webzine for fat dykes and the women who want ‘em”, was a witty ezine with both a sense of humour and a critical edge, dedicated to the discussion of body weight, body image and lesbianism. Unfortunately, *FaT GiRL* was in the process of relocating to a new location for more than three months and did not launch its new site in time to be included in this exploration. Other ezines that disappeared over the course of my research included *nonogirl* and *Many Shades of You* (msoy), two ezines by women of colour.

⁴⁸ For print zines the biggest barrier to reaching more interested people may in fact be the lack of knowledge surrounding the medium and sources of accessing zines. Personally, I had not had a significant exposure to the zine medium until I repeatedly stumbled across ezines online and was struck by their originality, appearance and tongue in cheek treatment of issues that exhibited a certain amount of relevance to my own life.

Print zines can be published by anyone who has the motivation and access to reproduction technologies, such as a photocopier.

Wright identified a fourth characteristic of zines as the manner in which their appearance differentiates them from the mainstream media. In comparing zines to slick and glossy commercial magazines, zines outwardly exhibit their do-it-yourself origins and distinguish themselves from the mainstream on their covers and throughout their pages with cut and paste collages, a mode of expression and visual presentation that is accessible to do-it-yourself producers, and sometimes handwritten text. Ezines are different in this respect. Creating an attractive and functional website requires time and energy but not necessarily extraordinary resources. Widely available applications, such as Netscape Composer and Frontpage, make creating a professional looking website a relatively straightforward task as long as one has experience with computers. However, taking advantage of some of the more complex features enabled by Internet technology, such as setting up chat rooms or bulletin boards, requires a greater understanding of the technology and programming.

Finally, ezines share the principle of a noncommercial ethos with print zines. They are not driven by profit, nor must they cater to the whims of advertisers. For this reason, ezine publishers also have complete control over what goes into and stays out of their end product. This freedom not only makes for interesting and refreshing content but also means that ezines are published out of love, rage and a genuine desire to share ideas and opinions, rather than in the pursuit of profit. The exception to an ezine publisher's control occurs if they include a space for unmonitored/unmoderated discussion among participants in the form of a chatroom or bulletin board.

Having the added dimension of interactive capacity enabled by the Internet, this content extends beyond the one-way communication of the ideas of one or a select number of individuals. In many cases these sites become hubs for the sharing of ideas, information and experiences between and among participants. Most often, the interactive aspect of these ezines takes the form of electronic bulletin boards. This means that the publisher or another participant can post a message that the rest of the participants can view and add their comments to, creating a "thread" of discussion. Some publishers create topic headings to generate discussion and provide some sense of organization, or allow participants to do the same. Bulletin boards are managed or moderated by the publisher, some of whom may manage more stringently and censor comments that they do not think are suitable for their site. Others adhere to the principle of freedom of speech or will only block another participant's comments if they are abusive or threatening.

Being distributed through electronic networks, ezines also have the capacity for linking to other websites. This means that not only can they link to one another, forming a highly accessible network among ezines of a given genre, but also to a range of other sites. These links provide direct and immediate access to resources, information, favorite sites, sites that are the subject of controversy or criticism and others that provide a means to action around a certain issue. Most of these ezines have a list of links to similar ezines and/or related websites. Participants on the bulletin boards can also include links in their postings in order to draw attention to a particular site of interest or deserving of criticism.

Research Plan

As noted earlier in this thesis, my goal is to generate an understanding of women-centered ezines, and contribute to the growing segment of feminist literature on the intersection of gender and technology. In order to accomplish this, I analyzed women-centered ezines in terms of content and in terms of the manner in which they make use of the Internet.

This thesis was not undertaken using a formal content analysis. In approaching it as an *exploration* of a particular genre of women-centered ezines, it seemed that a more informal and less constrained analysis would be most useful. As such, I drew on particular bodies of literature to guide my exploration and identify specific themes of analysis, or lines of inquiry to pursue. This chapter has reviewed the literature necessary to generate an understanding of various themes that are explored in the following analysis. Three distinct bodies of literature emerged to guide this exploration of women-centered ezines.

The first body of literature provided an overview of Third Wave feminism. The Third Wave is characterized as both an extension of and a response to the Second Wave that came before it.⁴⁹ It is described as “feminism for a culture-driven generation” (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000:134), as opposed to revolving primarily around politics.

⁴⁹ Second Wave feminists launched substantial challenges to the traditional feminine ideal of women as wives, mothers and sexual objects. They fought for women’s equality in the workplace, wage equity, reproductive freedom and against the sexual objectification of the female body. Despite the progress of the Second Wave in these areas, Third Wave feminists continue to see the need for stretching the boundaries of femininity beyond the traditional ideals and even beyond the perceived rigidity of the strategies devised by the Second Wave for addressing these issues.

As such, it privileges exercises in reclamation⁵⁰ and the celebration of the culture of girls and women, or Girlie Culture. However, it might be fairer to characterize Third Wave feminism as encompassing various degrees of emphasis on politics, culture and pleasure, as was demonstrated by the examples given of the Third Wave Foundation and the Riot Grrrl movement. Its characteristics also include the negotiation of difference and contradiction between and among feminisms, the idea that women need to define their own versions of femininity, and the advocating of self-empowerment, pleasure and a do-it-yourself culture that thrives outside of academic circles.

This exploration of women-centered ezines will determine the extent to which there is evidence of the negotiation of contradictions and difference that characterizes the Third Wave, and what mixture of Girlie Culture and politics they demonstrate. It must be emphasized, however, that due to the diverse nature of the Third Wave of feminism, the women-centered ezines at the center of this exploration were not expected to reflect all of the characteristics of Third Wave feminism, neither were all of them expected to reflect the same characteristics.

The second body of literature that informs this exploration concerns the Internet's potential as a progressive medium. It has been argued that the Internet has the ability to enable virtual communities, and provide for a democratic forum, or means to political engagement. As such, it has been suggested that the Internet resembles a virtual version of the public sphere. Others argue that there are many factors that mediate and, in turn, diminish the Internet's ability to enable either of these phenomena. The extent to which

⁵⁰ For the Third Wave, reclamation involves the re-appropriation of language, symbols, that had previously carried negative associations or been used to slight women and girls, and instilling them with renewed value and power. Obvious examples are some of the titles of ezines, such as *Cuntzilla* and *Bitch*.

women-centered ezines attempt to take advantage of the Internet's potential as a progressive medium in these respects is another line of inquiry pursued in this thesis.

The third and final body of literature concerns the history of zine publishing and considerations regarding the political nature of the zine medium. This section suggested that the publication of zines has been closely linked to the availability and relative cheapness of reproduction technologies, and in this case, production and distribution technology. The ways in which ezine publishers are adapting this new and technology to suit their needs and expand the features of their product is dealt with in relation to ezines' use of Internet as a progressive medium. More importantly, zines, and subsequently ezines, are considered by some to function as a stepping stone to political action in their role of components of a pre-political movement.

Drawing on these three bodies of literature, this thesis attempts to determine the manner and extent to which women-centered ezines are representative of Third Wave feminism, employ the Internet as a progressive medium, and function as components of a pre-political movement. In order to do so, it examines textual examples of women-centered ezines to illustrate these themes. The specific themes examined and illustrated in this thesis are *Girlie Culture*, *Sex and Sexuality*, *Consumption*, and *Negotiating Difference and Contradiction*, in Chapter Three, and *Virtual Communities and Political Engagement* in Chapter Four. In turn, these themes are used to discuss the political nature of women-centered ezines, or the extent to which they are components of a pre-political movement.

Following my review of the literature and the identification of various themes related to women-centered ezines, I selected textual examples of women-centered ezines

that could be used to explore and illustrate the themes. The process for selecting the ezines that form the basis of this exploration involved online search engines, primarily Google.com, and took advantage of the informal ezine network that connects similar websites through hyperlinks⁵¹. My awareness of the number and breadth of women-centered websites and ezines in existence expanded exponentially from these points onward. With the keywords “ezine”, “feminist”, “women/woman”, the search engine turned up a variety of websites with directory lists of women-centered ezines. By visiting these sites and others I came across in the process of the literature review, I uncovered the informal network. Almost every ezine hosts links to other ezines and websites, most often consisting of the publisher’s favorites and sometimes an accumulative list of related ezines the publisher thinks might interest visitors to their site. Throughout this process I visited hundreds of websites and compiled a list of over fifty websites I could continue to return at later dates as I narrowed my search criteria. Among these websites were sites for young girls, young women, senior women, women of colour, mothers, lesbians, girl gamers, and women involved in high-tech industry. As my intention to explore Third Wave feminist ezines in particular took shape, I determined that my search criteria would need to be narrowed. As such, I compiled a list of sites that were targeted at young women (late teens to early thirties), exhibited some or many Third Wave feminist characteristics, and either self identified or had been identified in the literature I reviewed, as ezines. My selection of representative ezines for analysis was narrowed further by the requirement that they be current and contain sufficient content to contribute

⁵¹ Hyperlinks, or simply links, are electronic linkages between websites that allow the user seamless and immediate access to other websites from the one they are currently viewing.

to an analysis. In the end, I selected four ezines to serve as representative of Third Wave feminist ezines: *Cuntzilla*, *BUST*, *Disgruntled Housewife* and *Marigold*.

My research involved regular visits to the selected ezines, which took place over approximately two months – about three times a week – to analyze them in accordance with the various lines of inquisition that emerged from the three bodies of literature reviewed in this chapter. I also needed to gain a sense of the rate at which they were updated or changed. This proved to be erratic, even though some referred to monthly issues being published.⁵² Given the erratic publishing practices in this area, and the fact ezines can, and do, disappear without notice, I cannot guarantee that a similar analysis two months down the road would necessarily uncover identical findings.

One final word of clarification is necessary. In discussing the various people whose contributions make up the content of ezines, I refer to those who publish the ezines and typically contribute the majority of the content as “publishers”, those who contribute written articles or poems as “contributors”, and those who participate in the online forums as “participants”.

⁵² *BUST*, in particular, appeared to be in a state of flux, as independent publishers scrambled to keep both the print and online version afloat after the commercial publisher went under.

CHAPTER THREE

Research and Analysis Part I:

Women-centered Ezines as Third Wave Space

Introduction

There are innumerable websites online that are published by and for women, and could be referred to as “women-centered”. These include everything from online versions of glossy women’s magazines, to women’s health resources, feminist activist sites, shopping and product oriented sites, to women-centered ezines and more. Among this myriad of destinations for the growing number of female Internet surfers, “women-centered ezines” generally refers to websites that reflect the nature and content of the do-it-yourself print zine medium.⁵³ Like ezines in general, these women-centered ezines share some characteristics with their print medium counterparts. Probably the most obvious of these is the central theme that runs through both women-centered zines and ezines. This is summarized in the following description by Angela Richardson: “Zines by women often focus on the amazing aspects of the female experience that are, for the most part, invisible in the mainstream press” (Richardson, 1996:2). This is clearly not the same “female experience” that is often portrayed within women’s glossy magazines, which intimates that women are consumed by maintaining a trim young figure, pleasing men sexually and touting the benefits of one product after another. Instead, the “female experience” that is focused on by zines and ezines is based almost entirely on the ‘real’ experiences of the women who publish them. It is true that some mainstream media do allow for spaces in which women’s real experiences receive attention and validation.

⁵³ The term “ezine” is sometimes also used in reference to electronic magazines, or websites that are modeled after commercial print magazines. For the purpose of this paper, “ezine” is consistently used in reference to the electronic publications that reflect the do-it-yourself, non-commercial nature of print zines.

Yet, women-centered ezines, independently published and virtually uncensored like their print counterparts, possess the freedom to redefine what are acceptable experiences to publish, and exhibit a number of different qualities in their communication of these experiences. These may include the breaking of taboos in relation to content and an in-your-face, gritty style of address.

Emerging largely from sub-cultural realms that are not reflected in the mainstream media, there are various genres of women-centered ezines, such as online personal journals, ezines for girl gamers⁵⁴ or women-of-colour⁵⁵, and ezines associated with alternative spirituality⁵⁶. Given that there are even those that perpetuate traditional feminine ideals⁵⁷, it must be made clear that not all women-centered ezines are necessarily feminist in nature. This exploration targets one genre of women-centered ezines in particular: those that manifest characteristics of Third Wave feminism. This

⁵⁴ "Girl gamers" are female players of computer and video games, including those that are played online by many geographically dispersed individuals. See www.grrlgamer.com

⁵⁵ A website named *Machete* provides a directory and reviews of ezines by women-of-colour.

⁵⁶ See www.yoni.com.

⁵⁷ For example, *Commitment*, identifies itself as being "For women who are committed to their work, their world, their soul-mate, their children, their friends, themselves. . .". "Beauty and Fashion" section includes an article titled "Go from frump to wow power", that asks "Are you a frump? Or do you have wow power?", and offers frumpy ladies who desire wow power the following advice:

A woman with wow power may not have lots of money to buy the absolute best clothes, but she does take time in selecting colors that flatter her skin tones, and she is disciplined enough to sew pretty buttons on an otherwise plain dress.

A woman with wow power learns her personal wow formula, from buying blush that flatters her, to selecting a lip color that says 'kiss me...listen to me.'

She is the one who knows how to create a vision of herself that is interesting, pretty, soft, alluring, colorful, strong.

Her posture, her walk, her smile, the radiance from within is what makes people wow over her. To become a wow woman, you have to believe you are worth being wowed over. You can't sink into the background, or want to scurry through life hiding out.

This woman is ready for the grand entrance. She is okay with being looked at and admired. She likes feeling good when she looks in the mirror.

(Commitment, 2002, March)

If this website can even be correctly classified as an ezine, which I would argue against, its emphasis the importance of a woman's appearance, resourceful habits of consumption, suggests that it is certainly not feminist in nature.

chapter is dedicated to identifying the manner in which those characteristics are manifested online. Through examples from select ezines, it will be shown that Third Wave, women-centered ezines exhibit specific characteristics associated with Third Wave feminism.

Although ezines in general tend to emphasize culture and pleasure more than politics, perhaps by their nature as Third Wave cultural products, the ezines that have been selected to serve as representative examples for this analysis are not completely bereft of politics. In fact, they exhibit varying degrees of emphasis on politics, culture and pleasure. Their content includes personal perspectives and/or experiences related to the current state of feminism, pornography, beauty culture, consumer culture, pregnancy, sexuality and much more. The manner of address often takes on a bold, in-your-face tone and is accompanied by an anything goes approach to content. There is a good deal of revelation of personal experience and taboo breaking in what, at times, can only be described as an attempt to shock the audience. Among other clues, this tone suggests that the targeted female audience is young, ranging in age from mid teens to early thirties.

Ezines Selected for Analysis

i) *Disgruntled Housewife* (See Appendix A, B and C)

Published by thirty year-old Nikol Lohr, *Disgruntled Housewife*, is packed with kitchy graphics and sardonic commentary on life's issues, big and small. Among the four ezines in my sample, it demonstrates the least political content, as it does not directly reference feminism, as the others do, and indeed does not openly discuss politics at length. It espouses feminism in other more subtle ways, for instance by challenging traditional feminine ideals. Perhaps the most widely known feature of this site is the

“Dick List”. With a long and growing list of entries alphabetized by the first name of the offender, participants share stories about their experiences with men and boys who have treated them badly. *Disgruntled Housewife* has 19 different sections in which Nikol and participants sound off on a range of topics, including pornography in “Naked Ladies”, and pregnancy and motherhood in “All knocked up and no place to go”.

Even though there is a specific section dedicated to Nikol’s sporadic journal, called “Welcome to my neurosis”, many of the ezine’s sections have a ‘diary-like’ quality, as one is privy to many different aspects of Nikol’s life and her personal reflections on them. In “Products you should use” and “Stupid crap I bought last week”, Nikol reveals her consumer tendencies. In “Seven Deadly Sins” she reveals the role each sin plays in her life and the extent to which she is guilty of it. Visitors are given ample opportunities to reveal aspects of their own lives in sections like “Secret Confessions”, “Dick List”, and *Disgruntled Housewife*’s popular interactive bulletin board called the “Country Club” (see Appendix B). Nikol has also compiled a lengthy list of links to other websites, an important feature of most ezines towards building the informal network of ezine websites (see Appendix C).

Although the word feminism is not prominent throughout the ezine, female culture, opinions and experiences occupy center stage, and traditional feminine ideals and notions of what it means to be a woman are challenged. Although reminiscent of Second Wave issues, the manner in which they emerge and are challenged here, are notably Third Wave in nature. The style of address and tone of the ezine is highly personal, exhibitionist in nature, with a blunt and direct approach to what is or is not acceptable to

reveal to the rest of the world. It is in this manner that different images of femininity are processed and validated.

ii) *Cuntzilla* (See Appendix D, E and F)

Although *Cuntzilla* makes use of the image of a young, buxom, traditionally feminine woman throughout the site, the content of this ezine is directly informed by a feminist approach. Published by an individual, who goes by the name "April", *Cuntzilla* is introduced with the banner "Feminism for everyone" and claims to be "a webzine for feminists of all shapes and sizes." In a section is called "the feminist report", April regularly posts feminist news items, comments on issues and events that are going on in the world, and reviews and provides links to interesting, feminist oriented websites (see Appendix E). Submissions of art, poetry, opinion/experience pieces and essays from other people are also included in various issues of *Cuntzilla*. Its "Inaugural Issue" focused on feminism and stereotypes (see Appendix F). A past issue called "The Political Issue" examined feminism and politics, including women with political careers, politics in the office and at home, and how being a feminist politicizes you. Another past issue, "What About Men", looked at "men's perspectives on feminism and masculinity, men who helped us become feminists, men we love, men we're glad to be rid of, and men who shaped us." It also included responses to the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. *Cuntzilla* has a resource section that consists of links to other websites in categories such as "other feminist zines", "women in politics", "ways to take action", "sex and sexuality", "more of the body", and "business and career". This is the only ezine in the sample that does not host an interactive message board, or bulletin board, that allows participants to have discussions among themselves.

iii) *BUST* (See Appendix G, H and I)

BUST is both an ezine and well known print zine turned glossy magazine. In October 2001, its commercial publisher, Razorfish Studios, folded but the *BUST* name was bought back and is being published independently once again. It bills itself as follows: “. . . too smart to be anything but feminist, *BUST* is ‘the Voice of the New Girl Order’ --and the only magazine for women with something to get off their chests.” The ezine’s main features are the “*BUST* lounge” (see Appendix H), and the “girl wide web”. The lounge is a bulletin board with multiple forums that are well used. These include, among others, “Media Whores”, a forum to talk about popular culture, TV, movies books, etc., “The F-word”, for discussions concerning feminism, and “Let’s Talk About Sex”. (self-explanatory). Two others forums are “Absolutely Fad-ulous”, which issues the invitation for “Feminists fatale, lipstick lesbians, and happy housewives (to) come on in and talk about kitsch and make-up”, and “Our Bodies, Our Hells”, for health and body related discussions. The “girl wide web” is a goldmine of resources with over 3600 links to other sites. The links are categorized under the following headings: “Culture Vulture”, with sub-categories of all things cultural; “She-Commerce & Services”; “Got A Life”, with numerous sub-categories for a wide range of lifestyle-related links; “WWWomen”, for sub-categories for feminist, women of colour, gay/lesbian/by/trans, etc. links; “Sex-E”, for all things sex-related, including information, education and pornography; and “Welcome To My World”, for all things personal, such as online journals. Other *BUST* features include the “broadcast” section, where feminist-relevant news is posted, the “stories” section, where articles from past issues are posted, and the “let’s go girl” section, where women can get and give travel advice, including where it is safe to go

alone in various cities. *BUST* has also appropriated images of fifties pin-up girls and advocates pleasure and consumption through their “Boobtique” (see Appendix I), “Stories” and “Personals” sections.

iv) *Marigold* (See Appendix J and K)

Marigold is the most serious and politically oriented of the four in terms of focusing on political issues and encouraging action among its readers and participants.

The origins of the ezine *Marigold* are explained as follows:

Once upon a time there was a lass named Audra Estrones who wanted to start her very one mega-zine. She was so inspired by Bust magazine that she wanted to create the Canadian equivalent and call it **Beaver**. No joke. For real she wanted to do this. Then she came to her sense and realized:

1. She totally couldn't afford to do a print zine, nor did she have the business sense to sell all those freakin' ads.
2. If she did a 'zine called *Beaver* it would be stocked on shelves next to *Barely Legal* and *Silicon A-Go-Go*. People would be too embarrassed to buy it.

Audra was talking to her friend Wing Chun about this one day, and Wing said something very wise which Audra will now paraphrase as “Dude, start an e-zine. Print is too damn expensive.”

Sadly, Wing was right. (This wasn't the first time.)

Somewhere in all the kaffuffle, the project was renamed **Marigold**, in honour of the cute red-head doll on Polka Dot Door, and became the site you are reading now. (*Marigold*, 2002)

Marigold claims to be “40% political rally, 60% slumber party”. As such, it has six sections that cover a range of topics and draw from a large number of contributors located across Canada. “The Lives of Girls and Women” section contains online journals from young women across Canada that are updated erratically. The journal contributors range in age from late teens to women in their early thirties with children. “Suffragette City” (see Appendix K) is a cache of opinion pieces on political issues and politics in general. “Whoa Nellies” highlights notable females of the past, present and future. In

“Re:Views” contributors voice their opinions on a wide range of topics, including popular culture and real life issues - there is even a special section specifically for male participants called “Boys own”, even though their contributions are also included throughout the site. The “Surfacing” section is a space for online art and poetry. Finally, “What’s that Marigold?” is *Marigold*’s online bulletin board that allows participants and contributors to discuss among themselves in forums related to each section of the ezine.

Girly Culture

As described in the preceding chapter, Girly Culture is about expanding feminism, and (re)defining femininity in a manner that is relevant to a culture-driven generation. This occurs at many levels in ezines, including through the reclamation of things female, such as images, language and female sexuality, the celebration of consumption and the rejection of traditional ideals of femininity. On the one hand, Girly Culture extends Second Wave feminist’s rejection of the social construction of femininity as weak and subordinate to masculinity, and their championing of a woman’s right to control her body and her destiny. On the other hand, Girly Culture sees Second Wave feminists as being “too serious, too political, and seemingly asexual”, as described by Baumgardner and Richards (2000, 137).

One of the most obvious and widely practiced expressions of Girly Culture is reclamation, that is, instilling value in feminine things and rejecting the traditional notion that anything branded feminine or associated with the feminine is intrinsically weak, worthless or degrading. A common form of reclamation in ezines relates to the previously mentioned appropriation of images of fifties pin-up girls and housewives. *Disgruntled Housewife*’s logo, for example, is a sultry woman in an evening dress, smoking a long

cigarette, and the ezine in full of images of half naked women on various types of collectable memorabilia including playing cards, glasses, etc. *BUST* rotates different images of barely clad fifties pin-up girls each time you visit or return to the homepage from the rest of the site. *Cuntzilla* maintains the same image of a buxom, young housewife throughout the site. Whereas Faith Wilding claimed that such images are used “without any analysis or critical recontextualization” (1998), in her discussion of cyberfeminism, I would argue that these images are recontextualized in the environment of ezines. The images are displayed in an environment that is under the control of the women who publish the ezines and in which predominantly feminist views and opinions take precedence. In this context, readers are encouraged to question the traditional associations of these images with the sexually exploited, subservient woman being objectified by the male gaze. Their juxtaposition with self-empowered women expressing themselves and feminist thought renders these images suggestive of women’s ownership of their bodies and sexuality. This conveys the idea that women can be sexual *and* strong, intelligent feminists who speak their minds.

Another exercise in reclamation that takes place in ezines, concerns language. For example, based on the fact that some people avoid self-identifying as feminists, or insist on adding any number of qualifiers to the “I’m a feminist BUT. . .” line, the publisher of *Cuntzilla* explains the selection of the ezine’s name as follows:

Cuntzilla. Is a combination of one reviled word with a complex and beautiful etymology and another icon of popular culture. Many of you are probably familiar with Inga Muscio’s adorable book “Cunt: A Declaration of Independence”, so you know that there is a small movement among chick feminists, many of whom would shrink from that “f word,” [feminism] to reclaim the word “cunt” as a slang honorific for women. Word reclamation is hardly a new thing. Think about “queer” and “nigger”. And there’s Godzilla. Icon of

kitschy monsterness and symbol of the dangers of industry and human domination of nature. Symbol of life, knocked down but fighting back. Not unlike feminism. (Cuntzilla, 2002)

Additionally, she makes the point that language can indeed be effective and powerful in making people think about meanings that have come to be associated with certain words.

What word could be more scary than FEMINIST? Maybe Cuntzilla. Or maybe, Cuntzilla, scary as it sounds, is just silly enough to make us realize how silly it is to fear feminism. "Feminist", after all, is a word given to us by the women and men who pioneered the idea of gender equality. It's an historic word; one to be proud of.

The connotation of the word "cunt" is also brought up for debate in the *BUST* Lounge thread "the big c word" in the forum "The F-Word". Here, participants generally agree that the word has had a negative meaning in the past, but is increasingly becoming a positive, energetic descriptor. One participant describes her fondness for the word as follows:

I love cunt... it's a happy thing for me, unless some stupid dog-monkey is attempting to use it as a pejorative (which doesn't happen often.) Even better than just plain old cunt imo (sic) is cuntalicious, as in I am one cuntalicious woman. I even went so far as to include cuntalicious in my bio for The Vagina Monologues (which I just finished up with.) There's just something about cuntalicious..... it sounds so damn yummy and fabulous, and it's much easier to see that you're using cunt in the positive sense. (beangrrl, March 06, 2002)

Another participant reflects on the word cunt in this way:

To me cunt is a word that only seems alright when it is used by people who have them. like the n- word. When I hear a man refer to the genitals I and half the population have as a cunt I get angry. or when he calls someone a cunt, connoting that it is a bad thing, I get angry, because how dare he have no respect for the genitals of women or the bodies of women. (naki, March 06, 2002)

Even the colour pink, a throw back to “girls are made of sugar and spice and everything nice” femininity, is reclaimed by Girlie Culture and used generously throughout the ezines. *BUST* reclaims the traditionally pretty and demure colour with a bright pink leopard print sidebar in their Lounge (see Appendix H).

Sex and Sexuality

Second Wave feminism made female sexuality a central issue, with its focus on the control of female sexuality, the sexual objectification of women, and sexual violence and exploitation (Jackson, 1993:225). Female sexuality continues to be an important theme for feminists and is also a reoccurring theme throughout the ezines in question. However, the articles and discussions in these ezines, are often more along the lines of the reclamation and celebration of women’s sexuality as a source of pleasure, and their control over it, as opposed to contemplative academic or theoretical approaches to female sexuality. Publishers and contributors often reveal their sexual experiences, practices, and preferences, whether heterosexual, bi-sexual or homosexual. The fact that no topic of discussion related to female sexuality seems to be taboo or beyond the scope of discussion, gives some of the content an exhibitionist quality.

An introduction to a *BUST* issue focused on sex sums up the sentiment that it is imperative for women to pursue and probe the realm of female sexuality:

It's no surprise that we gals have got lots to say on this subject. For all that twiddle about women being closer to nature than men, and sex being a "natural" act, we women have the most unnatural, culturally-mediated relation to sex imaginable. The rules of sex have been defined by men, and we have been mere playing pieces in their game, our roles being defined around, about, outside, and through us, but never by us. To play this game we could chose (sic) from a variety of playing-pieces: the Bad Girl, the Good Girl, the Virgin,

the Whore, the Prude, the Nymphomaniac, the Easy, the Frigid, the Blonde, Brunette, or Redhead, the Voluptuous, the Waif-like, the Pretty or the Skanky . . .

So, what do we really want, when we're allowed to do the asking? Well, we've been spoken for for (sic) so long that it's difficult to know. One thing is for certain: contrary to popular belief, not all of us just want to "cuddle," and not all of us fall in love with everyone we fuck. In fact, very few of the stories in this issue go anywhere near those gooey and sticky "emotional" aspects of sex. Instead, what seems to be the common thread in these stories, if there is one to be found, is the pursuit of pleasure, the acceptance of pleasure, and the allowance of pleasure, in whatever form it takes. We want the freedom to be a top, a bottom, or a middle. The freedom to say "maybe" and mean it. The freedom to wear spike heels one day and Birkenstocks the next. And if the guys complain that they don't know what we women want from them these days, that's their problem. It's been ours long enough. We're here, we're confused, get used to it.

In other words, in these spaces, women are in the process of exploring and demystifying female sexuality, continuing to break apart the molds constructed around it by centuries of male-controlled medical science, exploitation and cultural mediation. The following examples demonstrate the ways in which ezine publishers and participants are bringing female sexuality into the open and attempting to create female-centered knowledge around it.

One *BUST* story, called "Betty and Celina get wired", relates two contributors' quest for the perfect vibrator with reports on pros and cons of one recommended model. In another, "How to be as horny as a guy", the author, Lady J., lists secrets to becoming a sexual dynamo. These include masturbating, objectifying men, sharing stories with girl friends, having orgasms and watching porn. In *Cuntzilla*, archived past issues contain writings and poetry relating contributors' personal experiences with sexual encounters, breaking the taboo of discussing masturbation, and being a lesbian virgin.

Many of the discussion forums also contain discussions of female sexuality.

BUST has an entire forum devoted to “Let’s Talk About Sex”. There are discussion threads on learning to have orgasms, buying and using sex toys and vibrators, bisexuality, S&M, and lesbian sex. *Disgruntled Housewife* has a “Lust” forum, with threads about lesbian experiences, methods of seduction, and sex drives. Under the “Girls, Girls, Girls” heading, in the “Naked Ladies” forum is a thread dedicated to advice about sex toys and, in particular vibrators. Although these discussions are replete with participants sharing their personal experiences, often in an exhibitionist fashion⁵⁸, they also function as a source of information for the curious and less experienced. For instance, *BUST*’s “Let’s Talk About Sex” forum contains questions from participants in nearly every thread on a wide variety of topics. In response, other participants provide advice and information based on their own experiences. For example, in a thread called “hymens – let me in?”, one participant attempts to find out more about this mysterious part of her body, which she does not feel comfortable pursuing by other means.

By **kaitlin** on Monday, March 11, 2002 – 07:05 pm

I don't exactly know if my hymen is still intact or not. Could someone tell me how I can tell. I feel a little embarrassed to be asking this. Thanks a bunch.

I'm a virgin too. Forgot to mention that. But I don't know if I've broken it earlier when I was younger.

Kaitlin

Another participant responds with some basic information on the topic in question:

⁵⁸ For example, the *BUST* Lounge has a thread called “Getting Portions”, dedicated to allowing all to share details about when and where they are having great sex. Other than the idea that it functions as a space for people to share intimate details of their lives, the interest factor for others who might read this thread is a mystery.

By **valleyofdollz** on Tuesday , March 12, 2002 – 04:09 pm

kaitlin.

Is it tricky or uncomfortable to insert a tampon?

That could be a sign your hymen is still intact, then again it may differ from individual to individual.

I dont know the answer to that, the only thing that comes to mind is wait until you are ready to have sex to find out.

Hymens are just a little thin layer of tissue guarding our vaginal canal with a very narrow opening(to allow the monthly bill to come through). . .

You can break it from inserting a tampon (very much possible),you can break it from inserting a finger (or two).gees you can even break it from something as innocent (sic)as horseback riding.

While this may be the only venue that “kaitlin” and others are comfortable posing direct questions about female anatomy and sexuality, and the availability of the online forum seems a good alternative to not asking the question at all, the quality of information inquiries receive should be considered. Participants rely heavily on their own personal experience when responding to the inquiries of others, and while this may be sufficient in some instances, - i.e. when personal opinions are sought - in others it is not. Even in the hymen thread, there were different opinions as to whether or not a tampon or speculum could be responsible for breaking a woman’s hymen. Some participants, however, are in the habit of recommending other sources of information, such as literature or other websites on various topics, in addition to their own experiences.

These articles and discussion forums might initially come across as performing the same function as confiding conversations between a group of girlfriends, in helping women to become comfortable with their sexuality through the sharing of similar experiences. Yet there are a number of distinctions to be made given that they take place in the online environment, a space that is accessible to virtually anyone with Internet access, and not in someone’s living room, bedroom or over a cup of coffee. On one hand,

the very public nature of these conversations could contribute to the demystification of female sexuality by taking the discussion of it not only out of the medical field or academia, but out of the bedroom as well. On the other hand, the Internet also allows for the participation in and reading of these ezines to take place not only in the privacy of one's own home, but anonymously. The breaking of taboos about female sexuality and bringing it into the public realm is perhaps tempered, when it takes place among people who have the ability to hide behind their online user names. The issue of anonymity will be revisited in the next chapter.

According to the discussions of female sexuality that take place in the context of ezines, Third Wave feminists seem more interested in exploring it as a source of pleasure, than examining it as a source of oppression and exploitation. This is not to say that Second Wave issues have been completely disregarded by the Third Wave, as even within ezines, debates over the extent to which aspects of sex and sexuality are oppressive still emerge. An entire thread in the *BUST*'s "Let's Talk About Sex" forum is dedicated to discussion and debate around pornography's liberating qualities versus its oppressive qualities.

With a considerably lighter treatment of the topic of pornography, *Disgruntled Housewife* has a section devoted to "Naked Ladies", in which Nikol relates her various experiences with pornography. She recounts how she developed an early fascination with naked ladies by sneaking peaks at her father's Playboy magazines as a youngster. Nikol also discusses her experiences of finding her partner's "naked lady magazines" under the bed and explores the reason for her negative reaction. She concludes that it

was not that her boyfriend had the magazines, it was simply that the pictures of the girls in the magazines he kept looked nothing like her, or even any real girl. She explains:

. . . the pictures weren't sexy or erotic, just boring and dumb. Tired-looking women on the beach or in quasi-Victorian settings. (I'll never understand Playboy's penchant for Victoriana. Is it the male equivalent of corset-busters? Do all men secretly want to be Fabio?) They were all creepy. Not good-creepy like the slutty teen look, but bad-creepy, like exhausted 80s porno stars that look like all they really want is a cigarette. That was the worst part. I wondered why my boyfriend needed to pay \$6.95 a pop to jack off to these really dull girls that are nothing like me. Not that I'm not dumb or boring; I'm just an entirely different kind of dumb and boring.

The issue for Nikol is not that the women in these magazines are necessarily sexually exploited, but that she does not understand her boyfriend's attraction to them. A thread in the *Disgruntled Housewife* Country Club's "Naked Ladies" forum discusses a number of issues with respect to pornography after one participant shares her discomfort with finding her boyfriend's downloaded porn on the computer. Participants express their likes and dislikes for pornography, its usefulness in helping along discussions among partners about how to improve their sex lives, and concerns about specific types of porn such as that involving rape fetish and underage girls.

Consumption

If Third Wave feminists are considered to be part of the "culture-driven generation", then they can also be considered part of the "consumer generation". Most of these women-centered ezines have a section, or more, in which consumer products take the main stage. The significant attention given to the act of consumption in these spaces is likely due to the underlying emphasis on women's right to pleasure, and also, in part, to a practical need for consumer information. Publishers and participants often joke

about their consumer habits but these are rarely considered with any sort of serious criticism.

Disgruntled Housewife has “Products You Should Use”, in which Nicole and contributors praise consumer products. Nikol introduces the section with an acknowledgment that she is a consumer, and an avid one at that.

As a person very vulnerable to punchy advertising and snazzy packaging, I represent the enthusiastic consumption of Eisenhower America. I have entire collections devoted to my favorite packages. The best way to show your national allegiance is to cultivate a junky-like loyalty those items that make your everyday life delightful (sic). I have tremendous product loyalty. Here are a few of my favorite products. You should be square like me, and use them. . . I should be a spokesmodel, but rabid consumerism is a thankless task. (*Disgruntled Housewife*, 2002)

The tongue-in-cheek, lightly sarcastic manner in which Nikol speaks about her affinity for consumption and the products themselves betrays the notion that she approaches consumption as a pleasure seeker, grudgingly aware of the way in which her habits support capitalism. Her affection for Diet Coke, related in the following passage, is not likely what Diet Coke’s advertisers have in mind for selling points:

Diet Coke is not for dieters. Diet Coke is for those of us who are modern enough to take that leap of faith into the realm of the unknown. . . Diet Coke is that wonderful junction where science meets food. It is the ultimate synthetic food: calorie-free, nutrient-free, and vaguely immoral. . . Don't contemplate the possible side effects of the ubiquitous but nefarious Aspartame. Don't worry over the excess caffeine. Don't stew about the potassium benzoate or the phosphoric acid. These are mere trifles. . . (*Disgruntled Housewife*, 2002)

In the section called “Stupid Crap I Bought Last Week”, Nikol showcases things she bought that she knows she will never use, or admits are plain silly. She justifies the purchase of two half price *Ponds* skincare products by acknowledging that since she has

turned thirty, she “might as well go ahead and buy into the beauty myth, at least while everything's half off”.

Disgruntled Housewife also sports an entire forum dedicated to “Obsess/Consume”, including the topics “Household Products (Products You Should Use)”, “Food Products (Products You Should Use)”, “Health and Beauty Products (Products You Should Use)” and “Obsession du Jour”. The *BUST* Lounge has a forum called “Absolutely Fad-ulous” that issues the invitation: “Feminists fatale, lipstick lesbians, and happy housewives: come on in and talk about kitsch and make-up.” Throughout these forums, participants share their experiences with products, good, bad and ugly. They gush about health and beauty products, as luxury and necessity, household products that do wonders, and rant about all of those that do not live up to their name or advertising. One participant relates the liberation she felt in buying a power drill:

Buying my first power drill was one of the most liberating experiences I've ever had. I had just broken up with my boyfriend and I wanted to hang some shelves in my bedroom. I had no tools and was almost going to call my father to come help me. Instead I drove to Sears and purchased a power drill, brought it home, and hung the shelves myself. I decided that every woman should be issued a power drill at birth, so she would never need a man to hang shelves for her.

I have a hammer tattooed on my arm, symbolizing strength and power, and my next tattoo will be a power drill, to symbolize freedom! Viva la power tool!

(By **Islapiko** on Monday, April 01, 2002 – 12.23 pm)

As in many of the forums, threads often begin with one participant posing a question about a specific product, or asking for recommendations, in order to get feedback from other participants. While some might question the merits of an entire discussion devoted to the benefits and downfalls of various hair dyes for example, it is a way for participants to become informed consumers before going out and spending their

hard-earned money on a product or service. Through the forum they have access to information based on the experiences of others and their respective networks of information and resources, on everything from make-up, to using an online service to do one's taxes, to car friendly breakfast foods. Often, advice is given on environmentally or animal friendly choices and ethical choices in products. Any critical commentary is generally directed towards a specific product or service rather than anything to do with the act of consumption. These forums are similar to discussions that take place among groups of friends about product performance and recommendations. However, the online venue of these discussions means that there is access to a greater number of people, their experience, and associated networks of knowledge and resources. The Internet allows for many-to-many communication, and as such, the imparting of information to and among large groups of people. For example, one *Disgruntled Housewife* contributor to the "Reader Products" section passes on her experience and satisfaction with a female condom.

Reality Female Condoms

. . . They are kinda weird looking, they have a ring on both ends, you push the small ring in and it covers your cervix. And the rest just hangs out. The male enters the inside of the tube and, voila, well I received much enthusiasm from my partner. . . I would do a commercial for them. But then, that's why I'm writing you. Try them, you may like them as much as we do.

However, again the quality of information must be considered. As in the area of female sexuality, the opinions expressed are based heavily on personal experience. In fact, given how little is known about any given participant, a company pushing a product could, pose as a participant and use such forums as a venue for advertising if they so desired.

The act of consumption is accepted, and indeed celebrated, by these particular ezines to the extent that, *BUST*, *Cuntzilla* and *Disgruntled Housewife* all pitch their own products in support of their ezines and the ideas they represent. *BUST*'s "Boobtique" (see Appendix I), hawks t-shirts emblazoned with "BUST – the voice of the new girl order", "Toughtitties", or "Fight like a girl". Also, "Venus of Marmalade" soap, "Total Bitch" soap and wash cloths, Vinnies Tampon Cases, the Boob ring bearing a sets of breasts, Pinup girls pinky rings, bracelets and chokers, and *BUST* tested and approved vibrators. *Disgruntled Housewife* aprons, t-shirts, pj sets, and underwear all sport the title of the ezine and its logo of a sultry, pouty woman in evening dress. *Cuntzilla*'s various styles of t-shirts, boxers, mugs, tote bags have the pretty-lady-with-groceries "Happy Feminist" graphic, www.cuntzilla.org logo, and the "feminism for everyone" tagline.

Cuntzilla notes that its profits from sales go towards paying for its web hosting bill. The other ezines do not specify if they make a profit or how it might be used.⁵⁹

Negotiation of Difference and Contradiction

The Third Wave emphasis on the negotiation of difference and contradictions is a threefold concept. First, it necessitates the acknowledgement that difference and contradictions exist within and among feminisms. Second, it demands that feminists be open to learning about these differences and exploring these contradictions. Third, it means learning to come together around specific issues despite difference and contradiction. In other words, it is the acknowledgement that, in spite of multifarious differences and contradictions, there are specific points or issues around which women

are able to connect and, in turn, rally in support or against. Through this negotiation of difference and contradiction. Third wave feminism aims to avoid the narrowness of interests addressed by largely white middle class Second Wave feminists who attempted to relate feminism to a unified category of 'women'. Within the Third Wave, there is no such thing as a unified category of 'women', and it is accepted that the diversity of women can only be represented by a multiplicity of feminisms. As such, the Third Wave advocates the weaving of a feminist movement through networks that yield coalitions at various nodes or hubs, or the coming together around specific issues or concerns.

Considering this perspective, the ezines discussed here could never be expected to contain all of the elements of Third Wave feminism. However, they do function as said hubs in the network of the Third Wave feminist movement in a variety of ways. They also reflect the principles of acknowledging and accepting difference, and negotiating the contradictions between and within feminisms.

On the Internet, ezines are accessible to a wide range of people with diverse interests and therefore have significant potential to include a range of voices, opinions and perspectives. The desire to acknowledge and accept difference is reflected in a clear and straightforward manner on Cuntzilla's "about the zine" page:

Cuntzilla is an online zine with a big hairy goal – make feminism accessible to everyone. . . I want feminists of all ages, colors, genders, careers, etc. to have a place where they feel welcome. Where they won't be attacked for their ideas – challenged, absolutely! but not attacked – and can listen to and challenge the ideas of others. So that's cuntzilla.org.

⁵⁹ It would be interesting to explore whether the purely non-profit aspect inherited from print zines might be changing for ezines that attract large audiences. It is relatively easy to create a professional looking ezine and there is a much greater potential for larger audiences online, with no additional charges for distribution. It seems also to be the trend that ezines are beginning to carry commercial advertisements in the form of links, suggesting that publishers may be dropping the not-for-profit mantra.

The “mission” of *Cuntzilla* continues .

Like all groups, feminists have tended to gather like people together. It happens. And so it happens that we think feminists must fit a certain description in order to be allowed into the club. You know the stereotype. White. Middleclass. Halfway between professional and bohemian. Graduate of a woman’s college. Legs unshaven, lips unsticked. Not too attractive, but not too ugly. But feminism is not, and need not be, a special girls’ club whose membership is limited to a privileged few. Feminism is a word that describes anyone who believes women and men (and all people, really) must be treated equally and is willing to take action on this belief.

The ezine *Marigold* appears to show the greatest evidence of including a range of interests and opinions. First, the journal section, “The Lives of Girls and Women”, has representatives from across Canada of varying ages and life stages, including teens and young mothers. Second, the “Re-views” section contains a number of articles that suggest there is an interesting mix of young women contributing to and participating within this ezine and thereby introducing readers to a range of viewpoints. For example, Sitara Mohammad contributes an article on her perspective of wearing a hijab, the traditional scarf or headcover worn by Muslim women. She begins:

Unfortunately, in most western countries the understanding about why women wear hijab and its importance is severely limited and dangerously misinformed. It is my hope that my fellow non-Muslim can perhaps gain a clearer and more meaningful understanding into this aspect of the lives of Muslim women.

She explains that, for her and many of her Muslim sisters, the hijab is not a form of subjugation but a source of respect, dignity, inner peace and a feeling of completeness, and an expression of the freedom to make the conscious choice not to conform to fashion trends. In “(It isn’t easy) Being Brown”, Rebeca Dunn-Krahn expresses her frustration over peoples’ constant inquiries regarding the origins of her brown skin, her race and

ethnicity. She laments that if people are curious about her, why would they not ask her about something more interesting than the colour of her skin. In another piece, called “My Life in the 19th Century”, Sharolyn Wiebe relates her experiences growing up a Mennonite and reflects on the effect it has had on the woman she has become. She talks about her early rejection of the sexist views taught in her church with respect to a woman’s subservient role to her husband and all boys aged 16 and over. At the same time she admits to having internalized some of these messages and only recently has begun to deal with sorting out the positive and negative influences of her childhood. Sharolyn concludes that she is on her way to achieving a balance in her life.

I embrace feminism, without embracing much of the dogma that has become attached to it. I love mainstream culture, but prefer to not have a television set in my house. I adore many of the shallow things in life, like clothes and makeup and little flirtations at parties, but I don't for a second think that makes me a shallow person.

Marigold also has a substantial number of male participants and contributors, who have a presence throughout the site but also have their own space entitled “boys own”. Here, male contributors write about issues, such as what they see their role being in feminism, criticism and praise of feminism from a male perspective, male body image pressures, and even an amusing analysis of *Cosmo*. For example, in the following passage, contributor Steve Fisher relates his experience in a Women’s Studies class and how he felt excluded from the class and from feminism because of his gender. He comes to following conclusion:

I feel that a great weakness of feminism has been a neglect of men. If there is to be a future for feminism that is successful then men need to be included. Otherwise we will simply perpetuate a gender separated/controlled society. If only half the population is taught then we have failed. . . we need to bring the two parts, women and men, together in feminism and dredge everyone through a time of

discovery. However, I don't feel that feminism is at a stage where men can take prominent leadership roles in the movement. There is simply too much potential for a patriarchal mutiny within the ranks of feminism until it has become more established and widely accepted.

In the next passage, a contributor named Gilgamesh points to the increasing amount of pressure on men to conform to a certain body image.

Thirty years ago, Sean Connery could get away with having chest hair. Now, amigos, you'd better pony up to get that symbol of male virility waxed. . .

Having exhausted its rather sadistic glee on women, the machine is turning its attention to the hairy eared half of the species. Almost like watching a train wreck, I can see the process beginning anew. It started with hair replacement. Now, it's back waxing, torso waxing, liposuction, pectoral implants, butt tucks, lipid relocation, fake tans, real tans, facial reconstruction, chemical peels, hair replacement, laser hair removal, and selective nerve damage to smooth those wrinkles away.

In *Disgruntled Housewife*, Nikol presents and defends her views on motherhood, another source of difference among women. Her divergence from the traditional notions of motherhood riles some and garners support from others. In "All knocked up and no place to go" she expresses her negative feelings about pregnancy and motherhood. In the following passage, Nikol explains that while she finds the biology behind pregnancy rather disturbing⁶⁰, it is really simply that, biology. In her opinion, it is not necessarily deserving of the status of a mysterious life-giving power or miracle that is assigned to it by some;

. . . making out pregnancy to be "the greatest mystery of womenkind" is absurd. It's not a mystery; it's pretty elementary. All female mammals can become pregnant. Pretending it's some kind of

⁶⁰ Earlier on in the piece she laments that . "(pregnant women have) all got creepy little monsters growing inside them like parasites," and that it makes her nervous that women who work in her office seem to be becoming pregnant at the rate of some sort of infectious disease.

unique, holy situation makes women inhuman—like we're just lovely vessels for this miraculous process.

Her description of motherhood is equally unsentimental and alludes to her lack of desire to have children:

. . . a whole lifetime of worry. Like having a dog that outlives you and runs away all the time and chews up all your furniture and pees everywhere and hates you at least for a while no matter what. A dog that no matter how good you try to be is slightly embarrassed of you and will definitely lie and deceive you. A dog that won't let you pet it and that talks back.

Nikol's views of pregnancy, the process of giving birth and rearing children, are appreciated by some and offensive to others. *Disgruntled Housewife* has a section called "Hate Mail", in which Nikol posts negative mail she receives and a significant number of entries are in response to her perceptions of motherhood. In the following email, one woman goes so far as to charge that due to her views, Nikol is not a "real woman", and perhaps does not recognize the value of motherhood.

I understand you must be here for fun and games, but anyone who refers to a child in that manner is purely sick (avoiding characterizing you as human). You may have your rights as a citizen, but "my opinion" is that if you feel that negative about a gift that every woman is given then you are not a real woman, (thank god). It is a privilege, not a curse, and you ma'am (thank god, once again) will not feel that feeling. There are those that will never get the chance to feel what it is like to have that miracle, but to blatantly refuse the gift, I just feel sorry for you. . .
Thanks for your undivided attention.
Shirley; aka (to three beautiful children) Mommy.

Many contributors, however, thank Nikol for her demystification or deconstruction of pregnancy and motherhood, and express their own frustration about having to explain and defend their choice to remain childless.

I read your column with a huge sigh of relief. Other women, normal women, feel the same way I do! I'm in my early thirties and it seems like everybody has suddenly turned into a frigging (sic) baby factory. . . I have no desire to have children, and am utterly baffled as to why anybody would want to saddle themselves with all that debt, stress, and sleep deprivation. . . I get sick of so many people thinking that motherhood is a woman's highest calling and that a woman who isn't interested in kids is either a bitter lesbian, a man-hater, or hopelessly warped and adrift from normal society. Yeah, whatever. I'll never have to send my pets to college, or listen to them tell me they hate me because I won't let them get that \$50 Pokemon collector's card, or have them turn against me because I'm suddenly not "cool" according to thirteen-year-old standards. . .

There are even a number of mothers who congratulate Nikol on this piece and her down-to-earth approach to motherhood. One contributor suggests that although she is glad to be a mother most of the time, Nikol is "totally with it for knowing what is right for (her) and saying piss-off to anyone who tries to tell (her) differently". Another reflects on her own experiences as a mother:

Don't get me wrong, I love (my daughter), she's a great person and all that, and I even LIKE her—but from start to finish this is a ****lousy**** deal for the mom. 100%. No wonder all the major religions have to work so hard on brainwashing us in favor of it—that's what the whole virgin-mary-and-sacred-motherhood thing is all about . . . Thank you for cutting thru all the sentimentalizing CRAP on this topic!

This ezine reinforces the notion that women need not be defined by their roles as wives and mothers, and addresses the fact that some women have no aspirations for these roles. The result is the stretching of the boundaries of meaning related to what it means to be a woman or feminine.

Another way women-centered ezines might be considered to address difference and contribute to the Third Wave vision of an organic feminist movement linked together through networked hubs, is through the links that they host. By hosting links to other

ezines and other websites, ezines provide access to a wider variety of interests than the one ezine ever could include. *BUST*'s "girl wide web" for instance, includes links to "Women of Every Colour", "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans", "Younger Women" and "International Women" sites. Whether or not representatives from all of these groups visit and contribute to *BUST* is not known. Not surprisingly, participation in the *BUST* Lounge has heavy Western representation, with most participants residing in the United States and others from Canada, Britain, Ireland, New Zealand. One male participant listed South Africa as his location. However, participants are not required to fill out a user profile⁶¹, and when they do, it can be in any manner they like. In other words there is no way to verify what kind of representation is taking place in the forums. Therefore, by providing links to a wide variety of other sites, these ezines at least acknowledge that difference exists and provide an opportunity for people to familiarize themselves with what else is going on in the world and in the lives of other women.

Even though the desire to acknowledge and accept difference may be strong, the extent to which the Internet is a tool to increase exposure to difference must be tempered by the acknowledgment that it also limits this to some extent. We must continually remind ourselves that only those people who have access to the Internet can participate, and that there is a huge proportion of the world's population that is not connected.

The Third wave principle of negotiating contradiction is also in evidence on a number of levels in these ezines. The first is the negotiation of contradictions within

⁶¹ User profiles generally give the participant the opportunity to tell others in the interactive forums a little bit of information about themselves. Basically, people can include whatever information they want. Common user profiles include the participant's user name, most often a code name, where they are from (country and city), and such things as their favorite flavour of ice-cream, music preferences, etc. A participant can choose to reveal more information or none at all.

feminism. There are attempts at addressing contradictions between individual experiences and feminist orthodoxy, or the idea that feminists must live by certain rules in order to be considered feminist enough. For example, in “The Marriage Myth”, a *Cuntzilla* contributor addresses the contradiction between the stereotype of feminists, as not wanting to get married or have children, and her own situation as a feminist who finds strength in partnership.

The myth says that feminists don't get married because marriage undermines a woman's freedom. The myth says a married woman is a subdued housewife slave. But the truth is, I'm more free in my relationship than out. . . I'm a much stronger, braver person with him in my corner cheering and consoling. The independence to travel whenever I want, to do or buy or say whatever I want, the courage and encouragement to do those things comes from him - or more exactly, from the pride I feel about who we are together. (CJ, May-June, 2001)

A central theme that runs through ezines in their entirety is that feminism is many things to many people and that in order for it to be relevant to the lives of young women, its definition must be flexible and not as rigid as Second Wave feminists prescribed. The very combinations of content in these women-centered ezines that has been discussed throughout this paper, suggests that one can be a feminist *and* like to wear nail-polish, . . . and get married, . . . and be sexual, . . . and like to shop, . . . and have kids, . . .

The negotiation of contradiction *between* feminisms is often in evidence through the interactive components of ezines. *BUST*'s “The F-Word” forum is full of debates and discussion about different approaches to feminism. The following exchange is a small piece of a discussion on pornography that led into a debate between feminisms.

please do not define my feminism for me. the whole point of feminism for you is apparently different than the whole point of feminism for me. all feminists are not of the same mind. i guess you

are not familiar with radical feminism. deansgrrl.
 i think the sexual revolution has succeeded in making women more
 accessable (sic) to men. i think that women are serving themselves
 up to men just as much, if not more, than ever in history. we are
 eagerly participating in our own subjugation. that is how see it. we
 are even ENJOYING it. i know all about masochism. for i am also a
 woman.
 and anyway, i haven't called for the oppression of male sexuality. if i
 called for anything it was to expose the patriarchial sexuality.
 (By **pneumatic_sally** on Friday February 22, 2002 – 06:48 pm)

Another participant challenges pneumatic_sally's position with another perspective.

MAYBE, just maybe, sally, the sexual revolution allowed women to
 see themselves as sexual beings and enjoy that fact. Just because
 women are out there exploring their sexuality more, doesn't mean
 we're offering ourselves up to men. Perhaps I do not understand
 radical feminism. What does radical feminism have to offer as an
 explanation that there are women out there who are really genuinely
 HAPPY as women, who do not feel victimized by "male" society,
 despite being fully aware of the problems that still face women
 today?

I think i don't understand your conclusion, that we're participating in
 our own subjugation? Why do you so adamantly insist that we are
 always victims? To me, feminism is being a powerful woman, being
 myself, and working to create an environment where other women
 can be happy with themselves. I don't think the victim mentality is a
 step in the right direction.
 (by **deansgrrl** on Friday, February 22, 2002 – 06:55 pm)

Although such discussions rarely conclude with satisfied agreement between participants,
 often in the process of exchanging ideas and perspectives they find points of connection
 and agreement in their views around specific topics. This is an important aspect of Third
 Wave feminism, that is, that feminisms are as varied as women but there are connections
 on different levels that allow for the possibility of coming together in support of a
 specific issue.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the manner in which characteristics of Third Wave feminism are manifested in this particular genre of women-centered ezines, including Girlie Culture, exercises in reclamation, celebrating pleasure through consumption, and negotiating difference and contradictions. From this point onward, this genre of women-centered ezines will be referred to as 'Third Wave ezines'.

Thus far, the content considered in this chapter is not particularly political in nature. However, one should recall Patricia Wise's assertion that the formation of networks, even in the form of socializing or gossiping, yields support and solidarity that contributes to the continued existence of a counter culture (Wise, 1998:188). At the same time, one should be reminded of Gramsci's assertion that counterhegemonic culture, or that which arises out of dissent and provides a countervision of society, "had to be linked to a political program and political organization and result in real changes in the physical nature of the economic system." (Duncombe, 1997:175-176). In light of this perspective, Third Wave ezines could be considered more accurately as components of a pre-political movement as described by Duncombe. They exhibit the pre-political movement's characteristics of having a close association to lived experience, lack of formal organization, and serving the function of spaces "to test out new ideas and to imagine a different way of ordering things" (Duncombe, 1997:179-181). Their ability to act as a stepping stone to political action as a *pre-political* movement, however, may be questioned at this point. The next chapter will shed some light on how women-centered ezines might play such a role in its discussion of the Internet as a networking tool among Third Wave feminists.

CHAPTER FOUR

Research and Analysis Part II: Internet as a Progressive Medium

Introduction

It is premature to claim that the Internet is an electronic version of the ideal democratic sphere. To a certain extent, however, the Internet does allow for interesting patterns and flows of communication through its capacity for enabling many-to-many communication. Third Wave ezines take advantage of this, as well as the Internet's networked structure that allows for links between websites, in a number of ways. Some examples of the type of interaction that takes place in the electronic forums or bulletin boards of the ezines has been alluded to in the preceding chapter. In the following sections, the ezines' use of the technology as a means to political engagement and consciousness-raising, and the establishment of communities will be discussed.

Political Engagement

The Internet has the ability to enable opportunities for equal participation in cultural discourse and provide wide access to information and resources. If one accepts that these capacities provide the Internet with the potential to be a democratic medium and that the ezines discussed here are sites of Third Wave feminism, it can be argued that they take advantage of the Internet as a democratizing medium in a number of ways. First, the many to many communication enabled by the Internet allows the publishers, contributors and participants to speak their minds freely and participate in open interaction. Second, women-centered ezines are excellent sources of information and resources; not only does a visitor have access to the content and links within the ezine.

but also the knowledge and resources of all the participants who participate in the interactive forums. Additionally, the ezines discussed here provide information and resources in an organized manner around specific topics. This is often accompanied by related discussions, reflections and critical commentary that helps to contextualize and add to its value as knowledge. This may make it easier for those searching out specific information to locate it without succumbing to information overload and come away with a better understanding due to its contextualization. Conversely, there is no guarantee that anything published in an ezine is necessarily accurate, relevant, or interesting. For instance, the interactive forums, while full of interesting topics of discussion and articulate, intelligent participants, also contain a certain amount of self gratifying drivel by people who are inarticulate, do not understand the issue at hand and seem to participate for the sake of participating. At times, these contributions can make the forums difficult and frustrating to read.

In the earlier discussion of the Internet's potential as a democratic medium, both Rheingold and Gurak relate instances when the Internet was used as a key tool for political organization and mobilization around specific issues. Although, this may not be a central function of women-centered ezines, they do in fact draw on the unique communication capabilities of the Internet to organize and mobilize around Third Wave feminist interests and issues in two different ways. Ezine publishers, contributors and participants have the ability to highlight issues, provide information, and knowledge, generate discussion, and generally engage in consciousness raising, without the impediments posed sometimes by traditional gatekeepers. However culturally and pleasure oriented they may be, these women-centered ezines are certainly not completely

bereft of political orientation. For instance, *Marigold* informs readers about the World Trade Organization in “What’s the big deal with the WTO?” by providing a history of the WTO, and ideas about “the threat it poses”. *Marigold* also provides the “Utterly Subjective Feminist Reading Lists *courtesy of some Marigold writers*” for viewers to inform themselves about feminism. In *BUST*’s “The Antibreeder Club” forum, the thread “Bush + women’s rights = SCARY!” is a discussion about Bush’s anti-abortion stance and it being the reason many participants in the forum did not vote for him.

Third, the Internet allows these women-centered ezines to provide links, literally, to ways in which one can take action around those issues. Ezine’s are spaces of consciousness-raising that often provide links to websites through which people may become directly involved with the issue. For example, in the “Antibreeders” forum, Nikol posts this passage and link to the Planned Parenthood Action Network.

Oh, and y’all probably know about this already, but if you sign up for Planned Parenthood’s action network, you can automatically send faxes/emails to your appropriate rep/senator/government department. They’ll send you an email about the current issues, and you follow the links to read the letter you’re sending, then fill in your email address & hit send. It sends an email or fax w/ the information you have on file w/ them. Very easy, official way to pitch in.

Esp. good for people who are out of touch w/ who is representing them in congress (sadly, most)--it figures it out for you.

Forgot the link:

<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/action/index.asp> (Nikol, February 19, 2002)

In *Marigold*’s “Suffragette City - Action” section Audra Estrones Williams raises awareness about female genital mutilation in “FGM Does Not Always Mean Fairy God Mother”. She provides information on the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), what it entails, the purpose behind it, and associated risks. She introduces an anti-FGM

activist SiaAmma, who underwent genital mutilation as a youngster and now devotes her time in Africa and the US to promoting respect for the female body and awareness of the dangers of FMG. The essay closes with the following:

What can you do? Well, you can talk about it, that's important. You can make sure that people know exactly how catastrophic the procedure is. You can also check out groups like Amnesty International, who have a very detailed article about FGM and what is being done to stop it [here](#) , and find out about SiaAmma, where she will be performing, and how you can support her organization [here](#). You can give your time and money and voices to those trying to make this practise stop. Most importantly, you can honour and appreciate your own intact body and sexuality, and never take it for granted.

Another *Marigold* "Action" piece suggests "How to approach your candidates" with 22 questions about their party platform. The piece, "This election has 22 questions" was produced by Canadian Guerrilla Girls⁶² and includes the following:

9. The Federal Government has created none of the 150,000 new child care spaces promised in 1993. What would your party be willing to contribute towards the promised national child care fund?
10. Almost half of single elderly women live below the poverty line. What measures would your party be willing to take to increase old age security payments to provide older women with a decent standard of living?
11. Is your party prepared to take specific measures to ensure lesbians, gay men and two spirited individuals have equal opportunity in areas of legislation and public policy reform?

There is also a piece called "Political Party Info", with links to homepages and information on every political party in Canada – its caption reads: "you say you don't vote because you don't know where to get info? Look here."

⁶² "The Guerilla Girls oiginated(sic) in New York City as SILENT SOCIAL ACTIVISTS who distribute written material and thoughtful questions at local events. Their goal is to positively enhance the quality of life for women, children and all other living creatures." (Marigold, 2002)

For its part, *BUST* provides a wide variety of links to information resources and activist organizations through its “Girl Wide Web”. Here is a small sample:

- Center for Reproductive Law and Policy - A great resource for information on abortion, contraception, and other reproductive issues in the United States and internationally. The Center for Reproductive Law and Policy is an independent, non-profit legal organization dedicated to ensuring that all women have access to appropriate and freely chosen reproductive health services.
- CWRU Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance - The CWRU Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance is a non-profit, non-sectarian, non-partisan, voluntary organization associated with the Feminist Majority Foundation. We are pro-choice, pro-equality, pro-LGBT rights, anti-discrimination, pro-civil rights for all, anti-violence, and in favor of protecting and preserving the environment.
<http://cwrufmla.tripod.com> <http://www.feminist.org>
<http://www.feministcampus.org>
- Feminist.com- Your Home for Feminist Resources on the Web: Activism, News, Anti-Violence Resources, Women Owned Business Directory, Articles, Ask Amy & Much More.
- International Women's Health Coalition- A non-profit dedicated to empowering women, to gain control over their bodies through dispensing reproductive health/rights information. IWHC works with the governments in those nations as well as with grass-roots organizations in the targeted developing countries.
- the Street Harassment Project- The Street Harassment Project is a New York City based activist group that works against the omnipresent harassment of women and girls by men in the streets and in other public spaces.

In its “Resources” section, *Cuntzilla* encourages “Do something – take action for feminism”. There are links to “Speak up in general . . .”(vote.com, White House, US Senate, Feminist majority, Electronic Activist, Be a Voter); “Support abortion . . .” (Million for Roe, Planned Parenthood, Refuse and Resist, Roe v. Bush); “Fight violence . . .” (Feminist.com, Safe Network); and “Talk back to the media” (About Face, 50/50 Summit, and Guerilla Girls).

Hosting links to action will not transform every visitor into an activist. However, the combination of drawing attention to issues and the ease with which people are able to find out how to become involved – simply by clicking on a link – might be sufficient to get interested-but-inactive people involved. At the very least, awareness might be raised, and perhaps a greater number of active and engaged people will take the opportunity to expand their activism to include the issue at hand.

Virtual Feminist Communities

Chapter Two outlined many of the arguments in support of virtual communities and those that challenge the idea that communities can be formed online. If one accepts that communities, at least in some sense, can exist online, then women-centered ezines harbor a plethora of them. These are spaces where publishers, contributors and participants in the interactive forums, both women and men, come together to share stories, knowledge, information and resources, offer and seek support and advice, discuss issues that they find important, and amuse or be amused. These are communities based on computer-mediated interaction around certain interests, that is, people acting, or rather communicating, in response to one another. People connect online around specific topics of interest and develop a sense of kinship through their interaction with others. The virtual community may not be an ideal community for some. Yet, one could argue that the extent to which it could or could not be considered a community should be based on the role it plays in an individual's life, which is, in turn, dependent on one's personal experience of the online environment.

Frequent visits to the interactive component of the all three ezines that host interactive bulletins, indicate that there are a number of core participants for each ezine.

whose user names appear on a regular basis.⁶³ Sometimes this is the case for a specific forum, although most often, participants have a presence in more than one forum of the ezine. Core participants, or regulars, are joined occasionally by new participants, who either establish themselves as regulars or disappear.

There are a number of indicators that suggest this online interaction supports some form of community. First, the sheer amount of sharing, consoling and commiserating, not to mention advice seeking and advice giving, that takes place among participants in these ezines, suggests that interaction between members of a community is taking place. Additionally, the various levels at which this interaction takes place are extreme and range from everyday occurrences to life changing experiences. For example, in "The Lives of Girls and Women" forum, *Marigold* has a thread called "Today Is The Greatest . . ." for participants to share their good news and experiences on any given today. In another thread called "I love ya Tomorrow! Today, however is merely tolerable", participants have the opportunity to gripe about the way their day is going.

At the other extreme, the thread "Survivors' space!" in *BUST*'s "The F-Word" forum, is dedicated to discussions among rape survivors. Participants offer support to one another, share coping methods and express the ongoing challenges of being a victim of rape. One poster, naki, relates her state of mind and the inability to feel safe one year after she was raped.

⁶³ Some zines even identify regular posters with name categories. Posters to *Disgruntled Housewife's* Country Club are indicated as having the status of "Fancy Pants", for regular posters, or "Dilettante", for newer participants. Nikol's status in the forums is "Queenie". *Marigold* uses "clementine", "tangerine", "navel orange" and "kumquat", although apart from "clementine" referring to seasoned participants and "navel orange" referring to newer ones, the status of the other two categories is unclear. In general *BUST* participants refer to themselves and fellow participants as "Busties".

The rape was a year ago today. 365 days ago. Nothing is the same. if another person fucking asks me why i don't have a boyfriend i am going to cause some damage to something. boyfriend, yeah it's kind of hard when you don't trust anything with a penis. i know not all boys are rapists. i know that. i just don't know which are and which aren't. i know that it is most often people we know, but mine wasn't. he looked like your average boy. nothing scares me so much as an average boy, 20-25. and all those boys 20-25 who are average get older. they age just like us. and i'm not making sense anymore. i just want to go away. but there is never an away far enough. i've been a vomitorium for the last day, it makes me feel like i can authorize what goes in my body and what cannot. i can't even breathe. i can smell him. i can feel him in me and hear my screams and i can't shake the memories or the assault (sic) on my senses. (naki, March 03, 2002)

This is a powerful and very personal passage that perhaps only other rape survivors may understand. In the posts that follow, other participants do not really attempt to console naki, but offer their support, and share their own experiences. They admit that even time only dulls, but does not dispel, the feelings associated with having been raped, such as distrust and fear. In this case, the virtual community acts as an outlet and a kind of support group for women who have suffered a similar tragedy, and reflects the importance of women's communities as mechanisms for coping with oppression. This reflects Gillian Young's contention that the sharing of experiences can strengthen one's ability to cope within given circumstances. If one speculates that "naki" may have limited resources in her immediate surroundings for coping with her situation, the possibility that this virtual community might help her cope, makes it a valuable resource. On the other hand, at the same time that this virtual community seems to be helping someone cope with a serious situation, it might also be providing them with an excuse not to seek professional help with their problems, and in naki's case have someone monitor her mental state. By participating in this virtual space known only as "naki", this participant

remains largely anonymous, and while this may be the only way she feels comfortable expressing her desperation with her situation, it also means that she may be forgoing more effective, more permanent help in dealing with her situation.

That being said, anonymity, no doubt, plays a significant role, both negative and positive, in many facets of the virtual community. In general, people feel more comfortable asking embarrassing or difficult questions in an atmosphere where they are able to hide their identity. The positive role of anonymity, therefore, is that people are more likely to share experiences and ask questions about aspects of their lives that they might not otherwise feel comfortable discussing. This includes, for example, some aspects of female health and sexuality, and mental health, such as depression. Discussions on these topics take place in one or more of the ezines reviewed here. A person's embarrassment or difficulty speaking about a certain problematic aspect of their life can postpone their dealing with it and getting the help they need. While a virtual community is certainly not akin to professional help (although there very well could be a doctor or psychiatrist participating in the group), knowing that other people have similar experiences may increase an individual's comfort with broaching it in the real world.⁶⁴

The courage online anonymity provides some participants, contributors, or even ezine publishers, may also foster a culture of exhibitionism in these virtual communities. Much earlier the point was made that the anonymity available to Internet users had the

⁶⁴ A lighter example of the positive and negative roles anonymity plays is evident in a thread in *BUST's* forum "Our Bodies, Our Hells", called "Everybody poops (and farts and burps . . .)". Here, the participants discuss various personal problems, such as hemorrhoids, fissures and the wonders of Metamucil. One participant exclaims: "Wow. I'm new here and although I'm sorry you guys have ass problems, I'm so happy to find a group of people who do (and who aren't ashamed to talk about it)"(tivasmom, March 07, 2002). However, although there is a willingness to discuss these intimate "facts of life" openly, the lack of shame in these discussions may have more to do with the fact that it can be done anonymously.

potential to encourage playful disinhibition and flamboyant or outrageous behaviour. There are many instances in which people reveal considerable details about their life and lifestyles, whether it be lesbian sexual experiences or intimate details of their menstruation cycles. However, it could also be argued that this forward and brash manner is the result of the non-mainstream, non-commercial ethos touted as central to zine culture in general. Print zines contain the same degree of boldness and crassness. The online environment could be seen as simply making it easier and more convenient for more young women to take part in expressing themselves in this manner.

Disgruntled Housewife's "Hatemail" section attests to Herring's assertion that anonymity can also reduce social accountability and make it easier for users to engage in hostile acts. Nikol posts some of the negative mail she receives from visitors to her website with the rather understated introduction: "folks who don't go in for this sort of thing." Here are two examples of aggressive and abusive entries she has received.

From: PHUCT
 Subject: you are a piece of shit
 You are fuckin male dependant (sic) as shit. you wouldn't be bitching about men if you did not need them to give you companionship. Anyways, thank you for you worthless time.

From: kevin regan
 Dear Bitch.
 I do do (sic) not have time to read all of your infantile ramblings on your Web site. All I can offer is MY COCK, which will tame you and turn you OFF those hairy arse lesbian vegetarian sad fucks you are, at the moment, connected with....
 SO..... Wise up - B-I-T-C-H.

By putting these, otherwise private, messages all together to be viewed by other visitors. Nikol is exposing these hostile acts as best as can be accomplished online. Some have, what appear to be, real names attached to them. In these cases, it may be less anonymity.

and more a sense of disconnectedness from the real person behind the website, or the lack of recourse that may be taken against the perpetrator of hostile acts, that encourages such behaviour.

Regardless, there is little doubt that anonymity has a role to play in the construction of the virtual community, however, it is not necessarily *the* defining feature. The strength of the virtual communities that exist in these ezines is attested to in the real life connections that come out of them. In both *BUST* and *Marigold* there are references to the planning of face-to-face meetings or meetings that have already occurred between participants. Additionally, *Marigold* participants frequently refer to one another by first name and allude to their friendships outside of the ezine environment. It is not clear as to whether these friendships were pre-existing or forged through their participation within the ezine.

A further feature of the ezine 'community' is that they are open to be observed and participated in by anyone with access to the Internet, sympathizers and dissidents alike. In one sense this can be positive because it means that these communities have the potential to be rich in their diversity. However, on numerous occasions non-regular participants, have made an effort to stir up the forums, some with legitimate challenges to what is being said and others seemingly only to get a reaction. Legitimate challenges launched in a respectful manner most often are responded to in a similar fashion and result in relatively civilized debate, not unlike that which takes place among regular participants. Those whose main purpose is to get a reaction out of and disturb participants are referred to as "trolls". Depending on the troll's modus operandi they will receive different treatment from participants. The general rule of thumb is "do not feed

the troll". meaning, ignore him/her. At times the moderator will simply terminate a thread if a troll is successfully goading participants into a long and eventually pointless thread.

The combination of accessibility and anonymity enjoyed by ezine participants also lends itself to voyeuristic interests. Another unusual characteristic of many virtual communities⁶⁵: anyone can simply sit on the sidelines and watch what goes on without having to identify themselves. Additionally, the exhibitionist tendencies that emerge in ezines make them attractive to anyone predisposed to voyeuristic behaviour. Users who observe virtual communities and do not register a user name, and do not participate in the discussions, are referred to as 'lurkers'. Although this term holds a negative connotation, it must be noted that some lurkers are people trying to get a feel for the community, in order to determine whether or not they want to join.⁶⁶

Aside from the examples reviewed in this section, the chapter on Third Wave feminism highlighted many of the other topics around which participants in these communities have connected, from the reclamation of language, to exploring sexuality and celebrating consumption, to struggling within and between feminisms. These women-centered ezines contain content and discussion that do not take place in mainstream media at any great length. In these spaces women are free to be brash, crass, and construct femininity in ways that are relevant to their own lives and challenge the status quo. It has also been shown in this chapter, that these ezines are sites of politically charged commentary and criticism, and provide links to activism. As such, these women-

⁶⁵ Online bulletin boards can require registration and passwords in order to gain access.

⁶⁶ There are many instances in the online forums where a new participant in a thread begins by stating "I have been lurking here for a while and just had to jump in and say . . ."

centered ezines are reminiscent of Ann Ferguson's "oppositional communities" discussed in Chapter Two. She describes these as "spaces in which we can both empower and strengthen ourselves to struggle against those who wish to maintain the status quo outside of this space" (Ferguson, 1995:372).

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the manner in which Third Wave ezines make use of the Internet's unique capacity for many-to-many communication to enable and encourage political engagement, and form virtual communities and networks that support feminist interests. The manner in which Third Wave ezines take advantage of the Internet's unique communication capabilities will certainly not lead to the utopian revolt against men and patriarchy, predicted by radical cyberfeminists. It does, however, reflect the general cyberfeminist perspective that the Internet has the potential to serve as a tool to further the interests of feminism in a variety of ways.

These ezines serve as one variety of a Third Wave 'hub', among many, diverse others, that enables women to come together and learn about the ideas, interests and concerns of other women, as well as share their own. In turn, as hubs of communication and connection, these ezines have the potential to facilitate the assembly of coalitions that eventually act in support or against issues around which they unite. If the potential of ezines is realized to any extent, then they could indeed be considered elements of a pre-political movement, developing a language and approach to express their aspirations about the world, and functioning as a consciousness-raising tool.

CONCLUSION

Third Wave, women-centered ezines are attractive, engaging and, at times, shocking websites that are sure to catch one's eye in the deluge of women-centered websites that have flooded the Internet. However, as was demonstrated throughout this research project, there is more to them than funky graphics, flashy colours and kitsch. I began this research with a clear goal in mind: to generate an understanding of this particular genre of women-centered ezines, by identifying recurring themes in terms of content and in terms of the manner in which they made use of the Internet as a medium of communication. My larger goal was to contribute to the growing segment of feminist research on the intersection between gender and technology, specifically the Internet. By way of a conclusion, I shall recount my findings and attempt to place my analysis in terms of the larger context of feminist research in this area.

My pre-existing knowledge of this particular genre of ezines' links to Third Wave feminism made it an obvious path to pursue. I found that they manifest several characteristics of Third Wave feminism: some with a heavier emphasis on Girlie Culture, exercises in reclamation⁶⁷ and the exploration of female sexuality (*Disgruntled Housewife* and *BUST*), and others with more emphasis on negotiation of contradiction and difference, and political consciousness-raising (*Marigold* and *Cuntzilla*). I have been referring to them as Third Wave ezines, but it must be acknowledged that these ezines are by no means the sum total of the Third Wave. They do not manifest all characteristics, or even necessarily the same characteristics of Third Wave feminism. They are a small slice

of a diverse and disparate Third Wave 'pie', that requires further and varied investigation to ensure a better understanding of what is transpiring.

Also, I have developed a good sense of the manner and extent to which Third Wave ezines take advantage of the Internet's unique capacity for many-to-many communication. First, it was shown that the Internet is used as a means to political engagement by these ezines, including various exercises in consciousness-raising and providing the opportunity to link to sites and opportunities for activism. The second way these women-centered ezines take advantage of the Internet involves the establishment of communities. These may not be ideal communities, but ones that serve particular purposes, such as the sharing of common experiences, support, resources and knowledge. As a whole, this use of the Internet boils down to the formation of networks, an important pillar of the Third Wave thus far. The imperative of networking for the purpose of forming connections and then possibly coalitions, seems an ideal approach to be served by the Internet, itself an electronic network.

In considering the status of Third Wave ezines as indicative of a pre-political movement, this perspective is in line with views expressed by Baumgardner and Richards, and Rossi in the section on Third Wave feminism. It was suggested that the movement is in a formative stage, a swell or undercurrent of a Third Wave of feminism. Spaces such as Third Wave ezines lend themselves to the establishment of more solid connections, around issues that are found to be of common concern, through the networks which they foster. Baumgardner and Richards suggested the potential case of the abortion

⁶⁷ I must note that although I am quite comfortable with seeing the word *Cuntzilla* on my monitor screen now, and understand the reason behind its use, saying it out loud continues to irk me.

rights worker and the Vibrator Vixen finding common ground in the fight for women's right to have control over their bodies (2000:289).

It may be argued that I give too much credit to a cultural product, which is often more talk and aesthetics than action. However, I agree with Ednie Kaeh Garrison's assertion that one must not discount the value of Third Wave politics that "cross over and between what is called the 'mainstream' or what is recognized as a 'social movement'." (2000:164). She concludes that

(w)e need to consider the potent political movement cultures being generated by feminists. . . who are producing knowledge for each other through the innovative integration of technology, alternative media, (sub)cultural and/or feminist networks, and feminist consciousness raising. Such dispersed movement culture spaces are vital, as are the networks constantly being formed and reformed among them.
(Garrison, 2000:164)

In the very least, this research project has demonstrated one instance in which women are interacting with the Internet in a positive manner. In placing my research within the growing body of feminist literature probing the intersection of gender and technology, specifically the Internet, I propose that it illustrates one instance in which the Internet is functioning as a positive space for women. Contrary to Stewart Millar's and Warnick's research, reviewed in Chapter One, Third Wave ezines contribute to a positive discourse of women's relationship to computer technology. This positive discourse is the idea that women belong, and are comfortable, on the Internet, not as porn stars or victims of harassment, but as producers of content and knowledge using the Internet in the interests of many feminisms.

The literature on women and the Internet is certainly growing, however there are many different directions that women's online presence can be investigated. Third Wave ezines are not only one genre of women-centered websites, but merely one genre of women-centered ezines. I have referred to a variety of other genres that suggest further inquiries are required. For instance, what are the differences between Third Wave ezines and 'real' woman ezines such as *Commitment*, or those produced by and for women of colour and lesbians? What do these ezines offer women and to what extent do they take advantage of the unique capacity for many-to-many communication provided by the Internet? Moreover, in order to understand the Internet's role in society, and specifically, in relation to feminism, more than textual analysis is required. Additional research is necessary to investigate the user perspective of specific genres of women-centered websites. For example, what is the user's experience of them, what purpose or role do these websites serve in their lives, what do they take away with them from using/visiting specific websites? While there is much more work to do in this area, this thesis contributes to the body of literature on the intersection between gender and technology by examining one way in which women are interacting with and using the Internet to serve their varied needs and interests.

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Ezines Consulted

Bitch	www.bitchmagazine.com
BUST	www.bust.com
Commitment	www.commitment.com
Cuntzilla	www.cuntzilla.org
Disgruntled Housewife	www.disgruntledhousewife.com
FaTGIRL	www.fatgirl.org
Girlbomb	www.girlbom.com
G R R L G A M E R	www.grrlgamer.com
Machete	www.alafia.net/machete
Marigold	www.marigoldzine.com
Many Shades of You	www.msoyonline.com
Maxi	www.maximag.com
Nonogirl	www.nonogirl.com
Senior-Spirit	www.senior-spirit.com
Wench	www.wench.com
yOni	www.yoni.com

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APPENDICES

A-K

APPENDIX A

Disgruntled Housewife Opening Page

03.29.02 Things are looking up! Even when it's kind of gray and humid and overly still like today, I just love this time of year. (continued)

Beer or margaritas? Current results will appear after you vote.

- ☐ beer
☐ margaritas

Vote!

View results without voting
How was poll? Tell a friend

Like this page? Send this page to a friend!

Disgruntled Housewife

your guide to modern living
& intersex relationships

choose yer poison...

Dick List

Ask Queenie

Girls I Like Confessions

Pregnancy

Naked Ladies

Linktastic

Slutty

Pregnancy

7 Deadly Sins

Jiffy Products

Meals Men Like

Post Office

Fears

Help!

Stupid Crap

Working

Cocktail Lounge

Collectic

R.I.P. (Dead Stuff Archive): The Burning Question

Linking to Disgruntled Housewife?

Use this handy graphic! I love you for linking but I love you more if you use this here ps at (<http://www.disgruntledhousewife.com/>)

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Disgruntled Housewife - PO Box 9052 Austin, TX 78766-9052

snoop around, you dirty little sneak... ☺

APPENDIX B

Disgruntled Housewife Interactive Bulletin Board: "Country Club"

Country Club Disgruntled Housewife
Bulletin Boards

a member of the
Internet
network

Disgruntled Housewife sections...

Like this page? Send it to a friend

COUNTRY CLUB Disgruntled Housewife Boards

[my profile](#) | [search](#) | [faq](#) | [forum home](#)

Mumbles, ac, NailBunny, CutiePatootie, squirremonk, Princess, RebelWench, and 5 lurker(s)

Potluck**Blah Blah Blah**

Run that blabbermouth of yours.

5029 Please, for the sake of the...
(gattina)
April 10, 2002 09:21 AM

Who are you?

Introduce yourself.

1214 Who I am -- now it's your...
(FluffnStuff)
April 10, 2002 08:10 AM

Whadder You Afraid of?

Drive-by shootings, U.S. foreign policy, becoming your mother--what sends chills down your spine?

1509 From Beyond? (legolas)
April 09, 2002 09:55 PM

Cocktail Lounge

Our friend booze, and how it makes us cuter, smarter, more sophisticated and charming.

416 Bloody Marys anyone? (NailBunny)
April 03, 2002 10:28 AM

Meals Men Like

Extra sugar, extra salt, extra oil and MSG!

553 Pasta Sauce (MarshieP)
April 09, 2002 05:48 AM

Listastic/Linktastic

(Thanks, Lois!) Obsessive list-makers, form a line over here.

720 unfortunate solo artists (geekRising)
April 09, 2002 07:49 AM

Working for the Man

Office politics, revenge fantasies, going to meetings and getting screwed.

549 He's Finally GONE! I Win! (vappa's girl)
April 09, 2002 05:01 AM

Obsessive/Consumers**Collection Connection**

Hello, my name is Nikol, and I'm a compulsive collector. (Hi, Nikol.) Own up to your packrat vices and get busy enabling.

403 an ugly addition to the collection
(legolas)
April 09, 2002 10:09 PM

Household Products (Products You Should Use)

Stuff that makes your life a dreamy 50s commercial of housewifely bliss.

381 Microplane (lizzjane)
April 06, 2002 03:38 PM

Food Products (Products You Should

1101 Whats your local specialty?
(PrincessCherryPie)

APPENDIX B Continued

Disgruntled Housewife Interactive Bulletin Board: "Country Club"

💡 Health and Beauty Products (Products You Should Use) Does it make you cuter, stronger, cooler, healthier, or better smelling? Post it here.	870 📧 Hair removal and its ugly... (knickers) April 09, 2002 11:20 PM
💡 Obsession du Jour What's your current fixation?	612 📧 angus oblong (Creepy_Sadie) April 10, 2002 01:13 AM
My Friend Television	
💡 Days Like sands through the hourglass...	138 📧 dish about the latest episode (seekayrun) April 07, 2002 03:22 AM
💡 Passions Breathe in, breathe out. You keep me alive.	621 📧 Julian = SATAN! (ZillaAmerica) March 02, 2002 01:17 PM
💡 Buffy/Angel/The X-Files/Smallville/Strangers with Candy Teen drama. Monsters. Broadwords. Fighting girls. Halter tops. Everything television should be. All the shows I record.	343 📧 Teen Flicks (FluffNStuff) April 02, 2002 03:36 PM
💡 TV is a nickname and nicknames are for friends Daytime, nighttime, network, cable, dead or alive, there's one surefire source of unconditional love: television.	759 📧 Bad toupee! (seekayrun) April 10, 2002 02:38 AM
💡 And now, a word from our sponsors... Commercials.	393 📧 More Commercials We Hate (RebelWench) April 03, 2002 05:07 PM
Girl, Girl, Girl	
💡 The Naked Ladies Got smut? Naked Ladies, under the bed or otherwise.	548 📧 Strip Clubs?? (NailBunny) April 09, 2002 01:16 PM
💡 Slutty What's your favorite slutty look? And where do you procure it?	542 📧 OH so slutty (happydance) April 07, 2002 10:39 PM
💡 Girls We Like Friends, crushes, celebrities: the women we worship & why.	574 📧 Christina Ricci is skinny--not... (CutiePatootie) April 09, 2002 01:19 PM
💡 The Antibreeders' Club Pregnant women give you hives? Babies make your skin crawl? You're not alone.	648 📧 A moment of silence... (vappa's girl) April 10, 2002 01:52 AM
💡 The Breeders' Club See how nice I am? Mommies: talk amongst yourselves.	962 📧 Please tell me it gets easier! (vappa's girl) April 10, 2002 01:57 AM
7 Doodly Bits	
💡 Avarice & Envy & Gluttony (oh my!) Love of money + seeing green + this little piggy.	1168 📧 happy passover eating (lizzjane) March 27, 2002 08:43 PM
💡 Lust I must, I must, I must increase my lust!	1645 📧 Oh bloody swearing hell (swinehund) April 07, 2002 04:08 PM
💡 Sloth & Vanity Your lazy ass + pride cometh before the fall.	898 📧 Most hated body part? (vappa's girl) April 10, 2002 03:42 AM
💡 Wrath Hell hath no fury. Wait a minute. Hell hath fury. That's what hell's all about. OH! Like a woman scorned. Right.	1771 📧 Public Restrooms (BLECK-PTOOEY) (Automated_Alice) April 09, 2002 08:43 PM

APPENDIX B Continued

Disgruntled Housewife Interactive Bulletin Board: "Country Club"

The Outer Limits (brought to you by Martian Love Fest)		
Zine: A Warrior Printress Off-set or off to Kinkos? Print runs of 5 or 5,000? Zinesters beg and brag, recoil and recommend.	23	Goddess, Why am I so lazy?? (Membliss) April 08, 2002 05:22 PM
I'm with the Band Gear Geeks to Fashion Freaks. Where are you playing? What amp? And, damn girl, what is up with the glitter lipstick?	313	What would you name your... (legolas) April 09, 2002 10:25 PM
The Self-Esteem Fairy Kudos and Congratulations. Blow your own horn, or that of the next guy. Oh, shut up. That's not what I meant.	549	I am getting old and crusty!!!!!! (lizzjane) April 01, 2002 07:04 PM
Liquor? You lick her, you brought her! Tales of Broads and Booze.	170	your favorite beer (swinehund) April 09, 2002 03:38 PM
Duke of URL Sites that make you Swoon. (Yes, I totally stole the Forum name. Neener, neener, neener.)	167	total sweetness (Princess) March 31, 2002 05:39 PM
Funny Papers Comics: from Wonder Woman to Cynical Girl	201	Comics people - I know you're... (geekRising) April 10, 2002 07:56 AM
Enter Sandman All things Neil Gaiman.	25	Neil Cometh! (geekRising) January 24, 2002 01:27 PM
Runaround Sue Travel tips - from "Where to?" to "How to?"	435	The Mouse That Sailed (legolas) March 29, 2002 06:17 AM
The Dick List		
A is for Asshole	189	Archive: Read-Only Forum
B is for Bastard	285	Archive: Read-Only Forum
C is for Creep	270	Archive: Read-Only Forum
D is for Dick	407	Archive: Read-Only Forum
E is for Egomaniac	118	Archive: Read-Only Forum
F is for Fucker	38	Archive: Read-Only Forum
G is for Grubworm	154	Archive: Read-Only Forum
H is for Heartworm	40	Archive: Read-Only Forum
I is for Insect	20	Archive: Read-Only Forum
J is for Jerk	1	J. ANDY N**** (Metairie,... (The Dick List admin) June 07, 2001 09:28 PM

APPENDIX C

Disgruntled Housewife Page of links: "Linktastic"

Join! **Snowball.com** We are 1

Country Club: Linktastic Like this page? Send it

INSTRUCTION:
For linking at good tasting treats, it is no more fun than this peoples, all enjoyful with you!

Girls & Women
Links open and load into a second window.

- NEW Sublime
- Stitching
- Bullshell
- Sparkle Craft
- The Dainty Show
- epitomegirl
- Titsy's Journal
- Naughty
- Secretary Club
- Sarah Vowell
- on This
- American Life
- Brazen
- Hussies
- Frozen Feline
- Cherrybomb
- Scarlet Letters
- Lounge of the
- Ubermoles

APPENDIX C Continued

Disgruntled Housewife Page of links: "Linktastic"

[Chickelick](#)
[The Official](#)
[Xena Page](#)
[Working Girls](#)
BUST
[Emanzenpage](#)
 (English:
[Feminist Butch](#)
[Page](#))
[badkitty](#)
[NrrdGrll's zine](#)
[rack](#)
[Bettie Page](#)
[Anneli](#)
[Cloodt's place](#)

Boys & Men

[David Sedaris](#)
[on This](#)
[American Life](#)
[The Institute](#)
[of Official](#)
[Cheer \(home of](#)
[The Gallery of](#)
[Regrettable](#)
[Food\)](#)
[Black &](#)
[Cravey](#)
[Mark Thomas](#)
[PMoA's Pin-](#)
[up of the](#)
[Month](#)
[Jeff Blaine](#)

Gender-Neutral Sites

[La](#)
[Kitschenette](#)
[Dome-O-](#)
[Rama](#)
[Pixbarn](#)
[Pulp Fiction](#)
[Postcards](#)
[The Pit Bull](#)
[Press](#)
[Frozen Feline](#)
[Out of the](#)
[Frying Pan](#)
[Mullets Galore](#)

APPENDIX C Continued

Disgruntled Housewife Page of links: "Linktastic"

Black &
Cravey
Nerve
The German
(or Dutch)
Toilet
From Tom
Frank and *The
Raffler*
The Lee
Arwater
Invitational
Dead Pool
The Onion
Disinformation
Jeepick
Lobotomy
Charged
Dead People
Server
Bunnyhop
Antimasonic
references
page
Znet
The Skeleton
Closet
Mojo Wire
Qualye Quotes

ChickClick Survivors beathexberry
bimbionic
bohob
bust
breakup girl
cherrysucker
crafty lady
dawson's wrap
djdazy
element

APPENDIX C Continued

Disgruntled Housewife Page of links: "Linktastic"

hip online
hissyfit
hues
lawgirl
lookenpeepers

marigoldzine
mighty big tv
missgirl
mousy
maxi
out of order
out of the
frying pan
pencilbox
pop'sicle
razzberry
riotgrrl
rockgrrl
scarleteen
skirt
smartypants
smile and act
nice
spacegirl
squiffy ether
jag
swanky
technodyke
teengrrl
vagabunda
wired woman
womengamers
wench

http://www.disgruntledhousewife.com/linktastic.html

snoop around, you dirty little sneak...

APPENDIX D

Cuntzilla Opening Page

APPENDIX E

Cuntzilla News and Update Page: "the feminist report"

APPENDIX E Continued

Cuntzilla News and Update Page: "the feminist report"

Saturday (February 16)

colin powell, safe sex hero?

Sometimes politicians do good things (actually, they try to do good things all the time; I still believe that). If you heard, read or heard about Colin Powell's pro-condom stance in his MIT appearance and the White House's response, you can pass some progressive, safe-sex love his way by emailing and hitting vote.com.

Or heck, why not do both?

posted by adam @ 06:12 : (comments?)

Friday (February 15)

you gotta love her

Really, how can anyone not love Anne Bonnick? I'm not saying you need to go out and buy porn (but feel free if you like), but she's just so fun and open, period.

So it's always fun to see her in the local news.

posted by adam @ 11:27 : (comments?)

girls scouts and net propositions

Not surprisingly, girls get harassed on the net. I wonder how many of those girls are using AOL?

I won't draw any conclusions about girls' safety from that article, though. While, yes, online harassment is a problem and an annoyance, it's entirely possible that being harassed online toughens you in preparation for what you, girl extraordinaire, are going to be dealing with in life. When it comes to harassment, girls might be like babies and exposure to germs (babies who aren't exposed to germs seem to grow into children who are sick all the time). I'd rather learn to say "fuck off" to guys over AIM (where I could be as strident and lewd in return as I'd like) than first be confronted with that shit on the street, after all.

The conclusion I *will* draw from this is that the Girl Scouts are making more of an effort to be relevant in contemporary culture and girls' lives. This I like. I was a girl scout and, though it didn't have much meaning to me at the time, being in a girls-only environment has some definite benefits.

posted by adam @ 11:24 : (comments?)

APPENDIX F

Cuntzilla Issue Issue One: "The Inaugural Issue"

FEMINISM
for everyone

issue # one
may - june 2001

- home
- about
- submit
- comment
- in this issue

hey there...

Why does the world need another feminist website?

I saw eyesful of feminist content online (check the resources section of this site for a list of personal / reader faves). What I didn't see was anything addressing the possibility that feminists are what they define themselves to be.

Many intelligent women and men assume that you have to look, act, and think a certain way to be a feminist. Or that feminism is scary and emasculating.

I propose a change in perspective. I propose that we reconsider feminism for what it truly is. Equality. Pure and simple. Be a feminist. It's not a scary word.

Thank you, readers, for being so patient while I try to pull all this together.

- kerykes -

June 18, 2001 update - two new new articles!

So... What's in this issue?

This first issue is a small collection of reader submissions. We'll be expanding in the future. For now - read, enjoy and submit.

Scribner	Jess
Mirror	Rachel
A Lesson in Sex	Leslie
Shaving Is Like Heroin	Zan
Masturbation!	Ali
Perils of Being a Queer Wailflower	Rev
Hands	Zan
The Marriage Myth - NEW!	CJ

APPENDIX G

BUST Opening Page

APPENDIX H

BUST Interactive Bulletin Board: "the Lounge"

Discussion
[Show Topics](#)
[Last Day](#)
[Last Week](#)
[Tree View](#)

Search
[By Date](#)
[By Keyword](#)

Members
[Join Now!](#)
[Edit Profile](#)
[Forgotten Password?](#)

Help
[Getting Started](#)
[Formatting](#)
[Contact](#)
[Troubleshooting](#)
[Program Credits](#)

the Lounge

Welcome to The BUST Lounge!

IMPORTANT NEWS ALERT:
Our Publishing Company Went BUST--But BUST Lives On!
Read about it here: [BUST lives!](#)

Note from Celina: Image posting has been suspended. To include an image in your post, please use the following new tag:
`\imageurl{The URL of your image file}` Thank you.

- Media Whores** April 10 - 09:42 am
 The place for media whores and their admirers. Come talk about TV, music, movies and more.
- The F-Word** April 10 - 09:58 am
 Thoughts on feminism and its discontents. From Paglia to Aguilera, all are welcome!
- Let's Talk About Sex** April 10 - 05:03 am
 Mr. Gaye was really speaking for all of us--who doesn't need a little sexual healing? This is the spot (G and otherwise) to discuss what Mother never told you.
- Absolutely Fad-ulous** April 10 - 06:28 am
 Feminists fatale, lipstick lesbians, and happy housewives: come on in and talk about kitsch and make-up. Just be sure to wipe your feet first.
- The Mating Game** April 10 - 10:04 am
 Swans mate for life, but for us, nabbing a good one is no small feat. Here's where to chat about how to love 'em, how to leave 'em, and when to get a restraining order.
- Our Bodies, Our Hells** April 10 - 09:50 am
 Whether your body is a temple or a smoky, raucous, pool hall, this is the forum for all things physical. Work your cerebellum while you tone and slim your finger muscles.

APPENDIX H Continued**BUST Interactive Bulletin Board: "the Lounge"**

- **Working Grrls** April 10 - 09:24 am
Rather than make a voodoo doll of your boss, chat here with ladies who work hard for the money. (Students and slackers welcome, too.)
- **Friends and Family** April 10 - 09:56 am
A place to celebrate those in our lives who have loved and supported us. A place to bitch about those whose calls we dodge with the aid of Caller ID.
- **As the World Turns** April 10 - 09:28 am
Think globally, chat locally. An issue-based forum on politics, government, the media, and society. Pick a platform and mouth off.
- **Smells Like Teen Spirit** April 09 - 11:30 pm
BUST-y younguns negotiate the weird, wicked, and wonderful world of teen. Girl, you'll be a woman soon.
- **The BUST Line** April 10 - 09:18 am
Post problems and questions regarding the magazine or website. Here's where to contact the ladies who birthed the gum-snapping, bouncy baby girl we call BUST.

Powered by Discus

APPENDIX I

BUST Online Store: "the boobtique"

[● home](#)
[● subscribe](#)
[● boobtique](#)
[● email](#)
[● lounge](#)
[● chat](#)
[● girl wide web](#)
[● let's go girl](#)
[● BUSTcards](#)
[● broadcast](#)
[● stories](#)
[● persc](#)

boobtique

●●●● BUST Booby

BUST A-Year (4-Issue) Subscription
Price: \$14.97

Bust Magazine Single Copy
Price: \$4.99

The Bust Guide to the New Girl Order
Price: \$15.99

Bust Pink Baby T-Shirt
Price: \$19.99

Black Short Sleeve Bust T-Shirt
Price: \$19.99

Black Long Sleeve Bust T-Shirt
Price: \$19.99
Inventory: 25

Gold-plated Bust Choker
Price: \$9.99

Bust's Boob Ring
Price: \$29.99

APPENDIX J

Marigold Opening Page

MARIGOLDZINE

40% political rally
60% humor

combat boots and cardigans

journals	articles	profiles	opinions	arts	forums
<i>the lives of girls and women</i>	suffragette city	woah niles		surfing
Dice isn't going to take it anymore		The Maple Flavoured Women project		Two Weeks After Kennedy Jr.'s Plane Came Down by Anne Ross

your email address here

[REDACTED]

☐ Please yes!

the lives of girls and women | suffragette city | woah niles | surfing | the maple flavoured women project | two weeks after kennedy jr.'s plane came down

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APPENDIX K

Marigold Collection of Contributions: "Suffragette City – Action"