

#FEMFUTURE: ONLINE REVOLUTION

OTHER VOLUMES IN THE SERIES

VOLUME 1

*Responding to Violence, Rethinking Security:
Policy Alternatives for Building Human
Security*

VOLUME 2

*Women, Work, and the Academy: Strategies
for Responding to 'Post-Civil Rights Era'
Gender Discrimination*

VOLUME 3

The Work-Family Dilemma: A Better Balance

VOLUME 4

*Toward a Vision of Sexual and Economic
Justice*

VOLUME 5

Valuing Domestic Work

VOLUME 6

Reproductive Justice in Action

VOLUME 7

Desiring Change

To download any report in the New Feminist Solutions series, visit bcrw.barnard.edu/nfs or call 212.854.2067 to request a free printed copy.

#FemFuture: Online Revolution

Written by Courtney E. Martin & Vanessa Valenti

Infographics designed by Megan Jett

Published by the Barnard Center for Research on Women

BCRW gratefully acknowledges support for this report from:

The Jacqueline & Gregory Zehner Foundation

The Harnisch Foundation

The George Family Foundation

Trio Foundation

The Woodcock Foundation

Abigail E. Disney

Barbara Dobkin

Louise Forrest

Dolly Gray-Bussard

Helen Kornblum

Ann W. Lovell

Lori Ordovery

In BCRW's 2007 webjournal *The Scholar and Feminist Online* issue on "Blogging Feminism: Websites of Resistance," Rebecca Traister wrote of her introduction to the online feminist community,

Online, I found women (and men) who thought about feminism as much as I did, and who knew far more than I about its history, its legal applications, and its cultural implications. They spoke of gender, sexuality, race, age, women's health, reproductive rights, international human rights abuses, disabilities, physical and cultural difference, women in media, politics, and business. Their voices were, by turns, earnest and funny and academic and casual. They came from parts of the country I'd never visited, connected me to women I'd never have encountered otherwise.

In the past decade, this refrain has increasingly been sounded—the Internet has transformed not just the lives of individual feminist activists, but of activist movements as a whole.

But in the spring of 2012, Courtney Martin and Vanessa Valenti approached BCRW with a message: this new and exciting environment was in crisis. As feminist writers focused on online spaces they were increasingly alarmed by the severity of burnout they saw among their fellow feminist bloggers and online

activists. They wanted to make sure the landscape that had given them so much would still be around a generation later. Martin and Valenti had a compelling vision to make the landscape of feminist writers and activists online stronger; to create a sustainable force that would build on existing alliances among feminist movements and between online feminists and their institutional counterparts; and to develop an infrastructure of support for these important voices. BCRW signed on to support a convening of 21 local online activists and writers who brainstormed ideas about how they

could work more effectively and sustainably and what they wanted the future to look like.

This report provides a synthesis of those conversations supported with examples and recommendations from Martin and Valenti's ongoing research. BCRW is excited to release this report as a compilation of a few of the conversations happening worldwide, on and offline, about movement tactics and impact in the digital age. We look forward to continuing engagement in the years ahead.

Online Revolution Convening 2012 Participants

Lori Adelman
Feministing

Brittney Cooper
Crunk Feminist Collective

Dana Edell
SPARK Movement

Jill Filipovic
Feministe

Victoria Fitzgerald
Hollaback!

Emily Jacobi
Digital Democracy

Ileana Jiménez
Feminist Teacher

Shelby Knox
Change.org

Jensine Larsen
World Pulse

Samhita Mukhopadhyay
Feministing

Katie Orenstein
The Op-Ed Project

Miriam Zoila Pérez
Radical Doula

Andrea Plaid
Racialicious

Jennifer Pozner
Women In Media & News

Marianne Schnall
Feminist.com

Dena Simmons
Feminist Educator & activist

Jamia Wilson
Feminist media activist

Irene Xanthoudakis
Feminist activist & fundraiser

Julie Zeilinger
F-Bomb

INTRODUCTION

BY COURTNEY E. MARTIN

At a recent fundraising meeting for the pioneering site Feminist.com, I stood back and watched a line-up of some incredible feminist leaders—Carol Gilligan, Pat Mitchell, Kathy Najimy, Devaki Jain, Kathy LeMay—speak to the importance of the site, but more largely, to the feminist movement at this critical juncture. The wine was flowing. The women were rowdy. The call was clear.

We are facing a moment of challenge and opportunity unlike anything we've ever seen before. Now is the time.

I kept rolling that phrase around in my mind: now is the time. Was it really? Did they always say this? At 33-years-old, I've been “in the movement” long enough to know that plenty of patterns repeat themselves, that we tend to have amnesia about our good failures and hard-earned learning, and yet, it seemed like these four words were being spoken with an uncommon confidence. I wanted to trust them.

Standing near yet another one of my heroes, Elizabeth Lesser, I turned and said, “Can I ask you something, Elizabeth?”

“Of course.”

“Is now really the time? Have you all said that before in rooms like this?”

She smiled that subtle, beatific smile and said with absolute confidence, “No, *now* is the time, Courtney. We may have said it before, but we never meant it like we do now.”

The much-discussed “war on women” has created the momentum among feminists of a range of ages to fight back. Sexism that might have been too subtle to be targeted in a less volatile time is obvious in a climate where women's health, economic security, and sex lives are all under attack by politicians who clearly missed the memo that women are the

majority of potential voters, not to mention taking into consideration what is morally right.

These enraging and mobilizing political developments have taken place alongside the birth and maturation of online feminism. The explosion of feminist blogs, online organizing (including online petitions), and social media campaigns has transformed the ways in which the movement's most scrappy young entrepreneurs, thought leaders, and grassroots activists think about feminism and discuss the most critical issues of the day. Many have called feminist blogs the 21st century version of consciousness raising. Today, the online feminist world constitutes both a “communications arm” for the contemporary feminist movement and an inexhaustible force continually radicalizing and challenging its institutionalization.

Online feminism also has the power to mobilize people—young, old and everyone in between—to take political action at unprecedented scale at unprecedented speeds. So far this power has mostly been exercised in ad-hoc, reactive (as opposed to proactive), and unsustainable ways, but even so, it has had remarkable effects.

Online feminism has transformed the way advocacy and action function within the feminist movement. And yet, this amazing innovation in movement organizing is unsustainable. Bloggers and online organizers largely suffer from a psychology of deprivation—a sense that their work will never be rewarded as it deserves to be, that they are in direct competition with one another for the scraps that come from third-party ad companies or other inadequate attempts to bring in revenue. As a result, they are vulnerable, less effective, and risk burn

out. Under these conditions, online feminism isn't being sufficiently linked to larger organizational and movement efforts and/or leveraged for the greatest impact at this critical moment.

We must create more radical, intentional, and transformative relationships between all of the stakeholders in the feminist movement—the organizers, students, teachers, academics, activists, philanthropists, and online feminists. When we engage one another in creative, dignifying, and reciprocal ways, we will all be profoundly emboldened.

Which is not to say that forging this gap will be easy. It's boundary-crossing work—cross-generational, cross-class, cross-race, cross just about every line that still divides us both within and outside of the feminist movement. It is our hope that this paper will serve to translate the experiences and ideas of online feminists, working in a variety of contexts and geographies, to feminist organizers, writers, philanthropists and institutional leaders who have graciously and generously asked, as of late: *Who are you? What do you need? How can we help?*

We brought these questions and many others to a core group of trailblazing feminists working online on June 7, 2012 at the Barnard Center for Research on Women, our incredible partner in this work. What transpired was no less than historic. Feminists who have often only interacted online, had the opportunity to sit in a room for a full day and share their past experiences as online and on-the-ground organizers and bloggers, the truth of their current struggles, and their visions for the future.

This paper largely draws on the wisdom that was harvested that dynamic day. It's also an attempt to speak across the very demographic barriers that we have identified as hampering the full realization

of the feminist movement's promise. We hope that our peers will read this paper and find themselves honored, but we also hope those advocating from within feminist institutions or approaching this work from a philanthropic perspective will find that it sheds light on the strengths and challenges of the online feminist movement and sparks ideas for cross-sector collaboration. Historically, we haven't all spoken the same language; this paper is our attempt at translation. It's been challenging to write for such a broad, diverse audience, and we're sure individual readers will find fault in our framing and phrasing. We welcome the dissent and how it further elucidates the ways in which we can teach and challenge one another, and still find common ground.

What Vanessa Valenti and I have proposed in the pages that follow is a broad and eclectic ecosystem—a way for feminists with a wide diversity of backgrounds, ideologies, and ways of working to be of service to one another towards a larger shared mission of gender justice. This is a feminist version of what John Kania and Mark Kramer call “collective impact” in their widely-distributed paper of the same name, in which they argued that convening power and agenda setting are the key to large scale social change. In the feminist context, these two elements are so fundamental precisely because they create relationships, which facilitate the flow of ideas, resources, and—idealistic as it might sound—hope.

Kania and Kramer lay out five conditions of collective success: common agenda, shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organization. All of these conditions—though sometimes called by different names—surfaced organically as priorities for the leaders we engaged

with during our convening in June of 2012. What also surfaced was the need for a new map of the feminist movement. This will build on the work done in the *Follow the Money* paper, an unpublished report from Women Moving Millions, which explores women’s philanthropic giving, but will acknowledge the work of online feminists¹ and document the ways in which people are most effectively mobilized in this new landscape.

It’s not a simple map. There is no one feminist movement. Instead, there are many intersectional movements operating in tandem with much to learn from one another. This multiplicity is not only okay, but healthy and inevitable. The more radical versions of feminism will continue to push the feminist center, the center will continue to push the margins to be more strategic, those of us who dance in between will continue to be challenged and nurtured by it all. We will deploy diverse methodologies, mobilize diverse populations, and tell diverse stories.

There is paradox here. While the times we are living in call for social justice movements to embrace decentralization, our technological tools allow coordination among a much broader, more motley collection of organizations and individuals than ever before. The challenge is to ensure that the mechanisms of coordination and agenda setting are supported.

Pioneering feminist Florynce Kennedy, once said, “Unity in a movement situation is overrated. If you were the Establishment, which would you rather see coming in the door, five hundred mice or one lion?”

The five hundred mice have become millions, and unlike in Flo’s heyday, we’ve got tools to unleash them more strategically than ever before. Forging partnerships between feminists—online and off, younger and older, poor and wealthy, organizing at the grassroots and strategizing at the treetops—will have far-reaching consequences. It will foster the formation of new connections between grassroots advocacy and service organizations, educational institutions, coalitions, unions, convenings, conferences, legacy media, policy makers, politicians, entrepreneurs, etc. Online feminism has the capacity to be like the nervous system of this modern day feminist body politic.

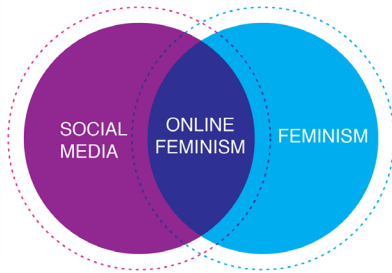
Just as Elizabeth Lesser knew the time is now with a sacred confidence, we, the authors of this paper, know this: if we can create infrastructure and initiatives that foster a flow of relationships, resources, ideas, and action, it will change the world.

1. The *Follow the Money* paper only documented organizations with annual budgets of \$300,000 or more. Only Momsrising and World Pulse, among the leading online feminist organizations, fit into this category.

WHAT IS ONLINE FEMINISM?

on·line fem·i·nism

Harnessing the power of online media to discuss, uplift, and activate gender equality and social justice.



WHAT IS ONLINE FEMINISM?

Online feminist work has become a new engine for contemporary feminism. No other form of activism in history has empowered one individual to prompt tens of thousands to take action on a singular issue – within minutes. Its influence is colossal and its potential is even greater. Feminists today, young and old, use the Internet to share their stories and analysis, raise awareness and organize collective actions, and discuss difficult issues.

The beginnings of online feminism were primarily in the form of online forums, newsgroups, journals and blogs developed in response to the need for a public platform where young women could voice their opinions about the state of the world around them. Many created websites and online zines early on; Heather Corinna began Scarlet Letters in the late 1990s, the first site online to specifically address and explore women’s sexuality, and soon after, Scarleteen.com, an online resource for teen and young adult sex education. Viva La Feminista’s Veronica Arreola took the feminist ideas discussed on the listserv of online organization Women Leaders Online to create a website at Geocities.com that discussed sports, pop culture and feminist politics. Later on, she developed the first pro-choice webring. Jennifer Pozner developed

Women in Media and News in order to create a space for feminist media analysis and increase women’s voices in public debate.²

Women were creating powerful spaces for themselves online, helping to build the next frontier of the feminist movement. These forums began as simple websites, and developed into communities of hundreds of thousands of people who needed a platform to express themselves. They found it on the Internet.

This is why so many identify feminist blogs as “the consciousness-raising groups of the 21st century.” The very functionality of blogs—the self-publishing platforms and commenting community—allow people to connect with each other, creating an intentional space to share personal opinions, experiences of injustice, and ideas, all with a feminist lens. Consciousness-raising groups were said to be the “backbone” of second wave feminism; now, instead of a living room of 8-10 women, it’s an online network of thousands.

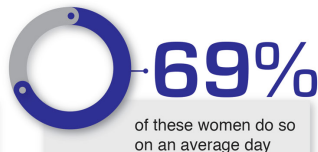


2. Corrected 4/12/13: Based on feedback, this paragraph has been corrected to better reflect the understanding of the work by those mentioned.

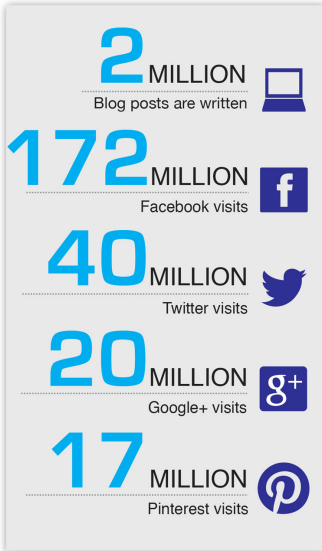
THE LANDSCAPE



“Young adult women ages 18-29 are the power users of social networking” — Pew Internet, 2011



In one day on the internet:



Engagement in social change online



Pew Internet and American Life Project

As years went by, social technologies began to evolve into a robust, diverse field of web-based tools and platforms. YouTube allowed for vlogging, or “video blogging”; Twitter and Tumblr, or “microblogging,” allowed for easier and even more immediate sharing capabilities. Today, this evolution of online technologies has produced thousands of activists, writers, bloggers, and tweeters across the globe who live and breathe this movement, engaging their audience every day in the name of equality.

In a study conducted in 2011, the Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project crowned young women between the ages of 18 and 29 years old as “the power users of social networking.”³ Eighty-nine percent of women use social networks and 93 percent of young people between the ages of 18 and 29 are online. Over 584 million people login to Facebook alone on an average day.

In this rapidly shifting technological age, it shouldn’t be a surprise that the next generation of social movement-building in the United States is largely online.

A NEW CHANNEL FOR ACTIVISM

The typical image of feminist activism has been pretty clear historically: women marching down the street, or protesting at a rally. From suffrage through the second wave, collective chants and painted protest signs had been defining markers of feminist action. And today, offline organizing continues to be a major tactic to galvanize the masses. Waves of protests across South Asia early this year following the death of a 23-year-old gang rape victim in Delhi are just one powerful reminder of the impact that a collective group of people can make on the ground.

The marchers that filled the streets of Delhi, however, weren’t just using their feet; they were also using their tweets. #Delhibraveheart—a hashtag, which essentially serves as a filter for a particular theme or meme—was added to millions of impassioned laments for the victim. Government leaders, who initially had an anemic reaction, were compelled to respond to the young people taking up space in the streets, but also those setting the Internet on fire with their rage. This dual approach is just the latest example that demonstrates how feminist

3. Madden, Mary and Kathryn Zickuhr. “65% of Online Adults Use Social Networking Sites,” Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2011, <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Social-Networking-Sites.aspx>

FEMINIST ACTIVISM, THEN VS. NOW

1970	2012
<i>The Ladies Home Journal</i> Protest	<i>Seventeen</i> Magazine Campaign
THE PROBLEM	
U.S. women's magazines were largely being run by men and advertisers, and stories focused constantly on beauty and housework.	Teen magazines for girls and young women often include photoshopped images of girls, leading to eating disorders, depression, and low self-esteem.
THE PLAYERS	
Media Women, New York Radical Feminists, National Organization for Women and Redstockings	SPARK Movement members, including 14-year old Julia Bluhm, Shelby Knox at Change.org
THE DEMANDS	
Hire a female editor-in-chief and an all-female editorial staff; having women write columns and articles; hire women of color; raise women employees' salaries.	For <i>Seventeen Magazine</i> to include photoshopping policies to help promote more realistic body images among readers, and pledge to use at least one unphotoshopped image of beauty per issue.

1970	2012
<i>The Ladies Home Journal</i> Protest	<i>Seventeen</i> Magazine Campaign
ACTION TAKEN	
A protest inside the <i>Ladies Home Journal</i> offices on March 18.	A Change.org petition, an online video documentary by Bluhm and Izzy Labbe, and a live street protest & mock photo shoot of "real girls" outside of <i>Seventeen's</i> offices.
THE NUMBERS	
Over 100 women mobilized	86,000 signatures on Change.org and over 13,000 views of the video documentary
THE VICTORY	
<i>Ladies Home Journal</i> produced an 8-page special section in their August issue on women's rights, and implemented day-care programs for the employees and editorial training programs for women. A few years later in 1973, Lenore Hershey became the magazine's editor-in-chief.	After a meeting with Julia Bluhm, her mom and SPARK Movement Executive Director Dana Edell, <i>Seventeen</i> Editor-in-Chief Ann Shoket made a public commitment to not photoshop girls' bodies in the magazine with a special " Body Peace Treaty " for their July 2012 issue.

activism has expanded to the online sphere.

The rapid innovation and creativity that characterize online activist work are game-changers in the contemporary art of making change. Compared to the weeks or months of prep time it takes to gather thousands of people in one place for a rally or march,

online feminists can mobilize thousands within minutes. Whether you're signing an online petition, participating in a twitter campaign against harmful legislation, or blogging about a news article, technological tools have made it infinitely easier for people invested in social justice to play their part.

Another striking development in online organizing today is the role of citizen-produced media in online activist work. On feminist blogs, for example, writers post commentary about the day's news with a feminist lens, highlighting and amplifying social justice work that is off the mainstream media's radar, and often linking this analysis to action that readers can take. This widespread, collective effort creates the necessary consciousness and a broad range of content that organizations like [Hollaback!](#), [Color of Change](#), [Move On](#), [UltraViolet](#), and the [Applied Research Center](#) draw on as they share articles, connect with others, sign petitions and pledges, and use online tools to mobilize on-the-ground action. Users can then be instantly contacted to request action in the future. Media-making essentially allows activists to become experts in the issues that we care about, and makers—not just advocates—of the change we want to see and be in the world.

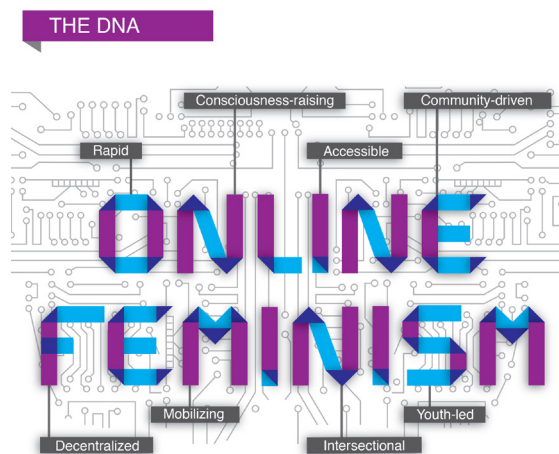
As decade-long activists, we have lived and understand the power of boots on the ground. The feminist movement will continue to make strides through lobbying, on-the-ground organizing, and creating meaningful discourse through academia, but online feminism now offers a new entry point for feminist activism.

A VIBRANT NEW MOVEMENT

We are currently living in the most hostile legislative environment to reproductive rights in this country in the last forty years. In 2011, we reached a record number of state restrictions on abortion. Contraception coverage is being attacked, access to basic health care services through providers like Planned Parenthood is threatened, and decisions about one's reproductive health are increasingly criminalized. The feminist movement continues to push back against each hurdle thrown at us. The days of proactive work and creating legislation

for equality, of securing our rights rather than defending them, has seemed far beyond our capacity when there is so much responsive action to take.

Yet when millions of women and men can tweet their demand for accountability from corporations,



governments, and media, we have an opportunity to shift this paradigm. For over a decade, online feminist activists have been working on feminist causes, but it has never been so visible. Now, feminist organizations, media, and corporate stakeholders, and national leaders are beginning to recognize how the power of social media and online organizing is reanimating the feminist movement.

ONLINE FEMINISM, A RADICALIZING FORCE

For years, online feminists have served as powerful allies for feminist organizations. We liveblog at conferences, tweet calls to action, and translate the sometimes jargon-laden organizational press releases into catchy hashtags, nudging people to look twice before they skip to a funny cat video. As we mapped the movement and the role

online feminism plays within it at our convening, we were all struck by the hours and hours of labor made visible.

The good news is that most major women's organizations get it. They recognize that online media is a powerful tool to create change, and have begun to leverage online tools in their work. For example, The National Domestic Workers Alliance, an organization that advocates for the rights and support of domestic workers, created a social media campaign, [#bethehelp](#), around the nomination of the Hollywood film *The Help* for an Academy Award. As controversial as the film's portrayal of African American domestic workers was, The National Domestic Workers Alliance recognized that it was a rare moment within mainstream media where domestic workers were in the spotlight, and they didn't shy away from seizing the day for their own radical purposes. The [#bethehelp](#) campaign was helped along by individuals joining in and popularizing the trend.

Traditional feminist organizations and online feminists are becoming more and more symbiotic in this way. Meanwhile, independent online feminists continue to invent new methods of action and catalyze new discussions that are pushing institutional feminism forward. In 2012, when the Susan B. Komen Foundation threatened to withdraw funding from Planned Parenthood because they provide abortions along with many women's and reproductive health services, Planned Parenthood had to respond to the Komen Foundation through formal channels in a professionally appropriate tone. Individual online activists were beholden to no such conventions. Digital strategist Deanna Zandt's Tumblr, [Planned Parenthood Saved Me](#), featured hundreds of women from across the country sharing their stories of how Planned Parenthood's health care has saved their lives. Those stories were a large force behind what compelled Komen to change direction.

Young feminists have been at the helm of online activism for the last several years. "We can't move too quickly over the important cultural (and deeply political) feminist work that younger women are leading, largely online," said Erin Matson, the former Action Vice President of the National Organization for Women, in an intergenerational dialogue at *In These Times*. "All this work is rapidly building into a platform that has the power to force big policy changes, and that's exciting."

Ties between organizations and online feminists have become stronger over the years and have sometimes provided resources for bloggers: organizations may contract bloggers to livetweet at their annual conference, pay for campaign ads on their blogs, or hire online influencers as consultants to assist with communications strategy.

But critical gaps remain between institutional feminism and online feminism. As Jensine Larsen of [World Pulse](#) pointed out at the convening, each has expertise that the other can benefit from; nonprofit organizations often have the infrastructure (physical space, resources, womanpower) that online feminists crave, and online feminists often deploy the communications innovations that nonprofit organizations struggle to generate while already stretched thin trying to achieve their larger missions.

Thus far, we've been exchanging our resources in piecemeal, inadequate ways. It's time to come up with a sustainable strategy that serves all of us, and strengthens the movement in the process. More meaningful collaborations between two of the most powerful sectors of the feminist movement could create huge impact.

CREATING A NEW PIPELINE OF FEMINIST LEADERSHIP

ONLINE FEMINIST FACT

There were over 1.3 million tweets and \$3 million donated to Planned Parenthood within the first week of the Komen Foundation's funding withdrawal

“When I measure the impact of my work, it really comes from watching one person’s action or one small group’s action become contagious courage, and to grow into movement building. That’s what really excites me and makes me see that our leadership is moving society close to a cultural tipping point.”—Jamia Wilson

Leadership development online can provide a means of resisting the hierarchical, insular, monocultural structure of traditional institutions. There has been a lot of debate about whether the World Wide Web itself can provide new tools for democracy, movement-building and alternative models of leadership. The Internet is not inherently egalitarian; after all, it was first created by the military and can be used in ways that directly reinforce patriarchy and structural violence.

But you don’t have to spend years making copies, learning a special language, or knowing people who know people to become a leading voice in online feminism; you just have to have something unique to say and the technological skills needed to amplify that story or idea online. This landscape allows for decentralized movements of multiple voices, communities, and identities.

In fact, many feminist blogs were born out of young women’s frustration with entry-level jobs at nonprofits where the mission may have been feminist, but the labor distribution made them feel invisible and, too often, exploited. While more traditional feminist institutions—

advocacy organizations, cultural institutions, foundations, etc.—develop initiatives designed to “engage Millennials,” they often overlook the young women in their own offices, underutilized and anxious to start flexing their leadership muscles, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of young women and men who are engaging with feminism online every single day. These organizations must stop operating on the “if we build it, they will come” assumption, and start going to meet young people where they are—whether bored and underutilized in their own offices and/or channeling their energy into active online spaces.

MAKING THE PERSONAL POLITICAL

The capacity for storytelling and relationship-building online allows young women — so many of them living in small pockets of conservative middle America — to feel less alone, to feel like they’re part of a community. This is one example of the hundreds of emails that feminist blogs receive on a regular basis: *I just wanted to say a quick “thank you.” I have been reading this blog for about a year and a half, and it has provided me with strength to live through some situations that I know I would have never gotten from anyone or anything else in my life. You have given me hope that it might get better, and I just wanted to let you know.*

This kind of connectivity can be life-saving. So many young women find feminism, not in their classrooms or even controversial novels, but in online blogs like [F-Bomb](#), a site by and for teen girls about women’s rights. Marinated in the voices and ideas of young feminists that share their sensibility, they are made to feel a part of something bigger than themselves—even as that connection is forged through the most intimate of stories.

In one of the most popular posts ever at the [Crunk Feminist Collective](#) blog, University of Alabama professor and blogger Dr. Robin Turner wrote in “Twenty things I

Janet Mock's #girlslikeus & National Black Justice Coalition's #BlackTransProud

In 2011, Janet Mock, then a staff editor of People.com, was the subject of a feature story in *Marie Claire* about her identity as a transgender woman and her transition as a teenager. Since then, Mock has become a major advocate for raising the visibility of and support for trans women, especially trans women of color, who experience a high rate of violence and discrimination. Sparked by the dismissal of Jenna Talackova from the Miss Universe beauty pageant because she was transgender, Mock began the Twitter hashtag #girlslikeus to signal boost campaigns by and for trans women. The hashtag organically grew on Twitter, sparking deeper conversations about transgender women of color and the injustices they experience. For the Transgender Day of Remembrance 2012, the National Black Justice Coalition took a page from Mock's playbook, starting a social media campaign #blacktransproud to raise awareness about the "intersection of racial justice and trans equality." Their Facebook page for the campaign received over 5,000 fans.

want to say to my twentysomething self”:

You are strong (your capacity of strength is so much wider than you think)...

but being a strongblackwoman is not a necessity or responsibility in your life. Your frailties and vulnerabilities make you human, not weak.

You are a storyteller and people will need your stories. Don't stop writing them down.

It is these kinds of poetic descriptions that transcend some of the more tangible ways in which online spaces like

the Crunk Feminist Collective serve to mobilize young feminists. It's not just about organizing on local issues or taking action on federal policy; it's also about healing, reclamation, solidarity, beauty, and wisdom.

PROVIDING AN ENTRY POINT

Decades of stigmatization have resulted in a toxic perception of what a feminist is. But that stigma is beginning to dissipate among young people as they see feminism in action online. Here, feminism is cool again.

At the end of 2011, *New York Magazine* journalist Emily Nussbaum highlighted the ways that feminist blogs use popular culture:

Instead of viewing pop culture as toxic propaganda, bloggers embraced it as a shared language, a complex code to be solved together, and not coincidentally, something fun. In an age of search engines, it was a powerful magnet: Again and again, bloggers described popculture posts to me as a "gateway drug" for young women—an isolated teenager in rural Mississippi would Google "Beyoncé" or "Real Housewives," then get drawn into threads about abortion.

Letting young women know that they can be a feminist and care about pop culture gives them social permission to care about equality. Tavi Gevinson is one striking example; she began blogging about fashion and feminism on her blog, *Style Rookie*, when she was 11-years-old. Five years later, she is the Editor-in-Chief of *Rookie Magazine*, the premiere indie online magazine for teenage girls. In *Rookie*, one piece is about how to create the perfect Fourth of July manicure, the next is a guide to protecting your civil liberties.

Another weapon feminist bloggers and writers use

is humor, countering the long held, wildly inaccurate stereotype that feminists have no funny bones.

Convincing the public that feminism can actually be fun through humorous quips on blog posts has evolved into savvy online campaigns that catch like wildfire. One recent example was the Tumblr blog [BWinders Full of Women](#), created after Mitt Romney's controversial remarks in the 2012 presidential debate about getting binders full of women for possible hires when he was Massachusetts Governor. The Tumblr included snapshots of women dressed up as binders full of women for Halloween, screenshots with witty captions, mock campaign ads, etc.

Demonstrating the serious side of cultural entrepreneurship like this, the creator of the Tumblr, Veronica De Souza, wrote in her last post on the site:

Now that the election is over, I think this whole thing is done. I never thought it would get this big, or that anyone would ask me to talk about memes on CNN or that this would help me find a job. I am so thankful for everything.

What De Souza and her peers are doing is essentially “culture jamming”—disrupting mainstream political and cultural narratives using crowdsourced creativity and playfulness. Latoya Peterson of [Racialicious](#) spoke to this in a 2011 interview with *Persephone Magazine*:

ONLINE FEMINIST FACT

NineteenPercent's feminist critique of Beyonce's "Run the World" garnered over 800,000 views on YouTube.

In a way, using pop culture to deconstruct oppressive structures in society is culture jamming. We are, in many ways, creating a distortion in the smoothly packaged ideas being sold to us. Pop culture is about selling lifestyles, selling ideas; it normalizes certain elements of our culture and erases others. Why do so many people have the idea that we are all vaguely middle class? Because that's what's represented in our media environment.

“Culture jamming” has historically been used as a tool to shape advertisements and consumer culture into public critiques. Online activists and bloggers use media like memes to transform popular culture into a tool for social change. The result? Young people online are transformed from passive pop culture consumers to engagers and makers.

Humor, pop culture, fashion, and the punchy, sassy writing, tweeting, and memes that online feminists deploy have become the most effective way to engage young people about the seriousness of injustice, using new Internet culture to speak back to pop culture.

RECLAIMING THE FRAME

Working within a media landscape drenched in reality shows and rape jokes is no easy feat for any feminist. With women comprising only 22%⁴ of thought leadership in most mainstream media forums and only 3% of clout positions⁵, it's no surprise that pop culture and legacy news can be such sexist, racist, and homophobic environments. In this context, online feminism

4. http://in.gov/icw/files/benchmark_wom_leadership.pdf

5. http://annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/Downloads/Information_And_Society/20010314_Progress_and_Women/20010321_Progress_women_report.pdf

continues to constitute both an alternative space, where feminist values are suffused in every point and click, *and* to influence legacy media.

The immediacy and viral nature of blogs and Twitter have fundamentally changed how we consume the news. Wherein the past relationship between the media and the public consisted of a top-down flow of information, the Internet has allowed the public to participate in and influence the larger public conversation.

This has resulted in a lateral relationship between the public and news media, to the point where online engagement influences the news of the day. Case in point: when a 31-year-old woman died in an Irish hospital after doctors refused to perform a termination of her pregnancy, despite the fact that she was already experiencing a miscarriage, feminist blogs were instrumental in spreading the story. [RH Reality Check](#) covered the story on November 13, 2012, and by the next day Jill Filipovic of *Feministe* wrote about it for the *Guardian*, with a number of other outlets following.

These days, feminist blogs and Twitter accounts can often be a source of both breaking developments and overlooked stories for mainstream media outlets. “Paying attention to feminist media through Twitter is essential,” said Jamil Smith, segment and digital producer at MSNBC’s *The Melissa Harris-Perry Show*.


I originally started using the service as an RSS feed of sorts, and that’s how some of the first voices I discovered—Jennifer Pozner, Jessica Valenti, Jill Filipovic, and many more—opened up a new source of political perspective, analysis, and leadership in the media for me. Personally and professionally, I owe them all an enormous debt.

Melissa Harris-Perry herself rose to prominence in part because of her longtime online presence, including her blog, *The Kitchen Table*, where she discussed a variety of

issues with friend and fellow Princeton Professor Yolanda Pierce.

Online feminism is not only bringing attention to the media gender gap through online activism, but also beginning to fill that space with a new generation of media influencers. Zerlina Maxwell, law student and contributor to *Feministing* and *TheGrio*, was, for example, recently featured in *The New York Times* as a political voice on Twitter to follow during election season. She strategically used Twitter to get noticed by mainstream outlets:

I picked a handful of folks [on Twitter] I admire that I looked up to and followed everyone they followed. Some of those producers, editors and thought leaders followed me back. Then I started tweeting at media folks if I



“Twitter shrinks the world and makes everyone accessible.”



Zerlina Maxwell

agreed or disagreed. Figured if they saw my name they wouldn’t forget it, and that’s exactly what happened... Twitter shrinks the world and makes everyone accessible.

Zerlina is now a blogger for *The New York Daily News*, a columnist for *Ebony Magazine*, and a regular commentator on *Fox News & Friends*, providing a feminist analysis that was largely absent in these spaces. And her story—one of a law student from New Jersey turned mainstream media commentator—speaks to one of the most remarkable things about online activism: it’s bringing feminist analysis and voices into the mainstream. “Mainstreaming the

voices of feminist media, particularly at national outlets like MSNBC, is essential given the demands of our news consumers,” says Jamil Smith. “As a more technologically sophisticated populace devours its daily news diet from a number of different sources, we not only need to provide spaces for women and men in the feminist movement to contribute to the dialogue and analysis we present on our air—but if we fail to do so, we’ll be the ones left behind.”

HOLDING POWERBROKERS ACCOUNTABLE

The new lateral relationship between the online public and the media has also created possibilities for a stronger culture of accountability. Sexism, transphobia, and nationalism in mainstream media are far too commonplace, but online responses to these biases are helping to push media stakeholders to be more accurate and less harmful. Online activism has convinced *The New York Times*, for example, to publicly acknowledge victim-blaming content in their articles and reexamine their coverage of transgender people.

Another powerful example: in the summer of 2012, The Applied Research Center and Colorlines launched a campaign, “Drop the I-Word,” calling on news publications to stop referring to undocumented immigrants as “illegals,” “illegal alien” and “illegal immigrant.” After a multi-media action strategy, including an online pledge and toolkit, a Twitter campaign and widespread blog coverage, mainstream media picked up the initiative. Announcements followed by those renouncing the usage of the term “illegal immigrant,” like *The Miami Herald*, Fox News Latino, ABC News and *The Huffington Post*, as well as those who continue to use it, including *The New York Times*. Today, the Drop The I-Word campaign continues to influence

media and individuals in their efforts to create better public representation of undocumented immigrant communities. (And still sends letters to *The New York Times* in response to their continued use of the word.)

Feminists can mobilize online in response to politician and corporate actions as well. When the news broke that Representative Todd Akin told KTVI-TV that pregnancy from rape is rare because “if it’s a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down,” feminists responded immediately. “Todd Akin” quickly became a trending topic on Twitter. Tumblrs, social media campaigns and Internet memes followed suit, calling Akin unelectable. Thousands took to Akin’s Facebook page urging him to withdraw from the race. While he didn’t take his constituents’ and colleagues’ advice, social media no doubt played a role in his loss on Election Day.

Akin’s story was covered all over the country, but stories of movement toward accountability are happening in different pockets of the online community on a regular basis, demonstrating the need for positive and pro-active communication. In June 2011, Vanessa Valenti wrote a blog post critiquing New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand for saying that the women’s movement was “stalled,” because too many women were “not engaged” and “don’t want their voices to be heard” on MSNBC’s *Morning Joe*. She was on discussing her new initiative, “Off the Sidelines.” As a very engaged participant in the women’s movement and co-founder of a blog whose success has been built on the hundreds of thousands of voices seeking to be heard, Vanessa felt a responsibility to disagree:

I’m not saying there’s anything wrong with trying to mobilize women who aren’t politically active, because of course there are folks out there who aren’t. But how can you say they don’t want their voices heard when you’re the one speaking for them? Because that is one of the biggest lessons we here at Feministing have

ONLINE FEMINISM IN ACTION

From
Outrage
to
Impact

Case Study: Facebook's "Rape Pages"

In July 2011, Fan pages, some garnering hundreds of thousands of fans, pop up across Facebook with titles such as:

- "Riding your Girlfriend softly, cause you don't want to wake her up"
- "I know a silly little bitch that needs a good slap"



" " " " " "

Facebook responds in statement to BBC: "Just as telling a rude joke won't get you thrown out of your local pub, it won't get you thrown off Facebook."

Facebook advertisers Sony, American Express and BlackBerry request that their advertising be removed from the pages

change.org
150,000
SIGNATURES

John Raines of Florida creates Change.org petition calling on Facebook CEO to remove pages, reaches 150,000 signatures

Feminist blogs make a call to report the pages for removal based on their Terms of Policy prohibiting violent language or hate speech.

Day of Action
NOVEMBER 1ST

Blogs write about Facebook response and Change.org day of action on November 1st

200,000
SIGNATURES

Petition signature numbers spike to over 200,000

#NotFunnyFacebook
200 times per hour

#NotFunnyFacebook Twitter hashtag campaign peaks to rate of 200 times per hour

Three months after start of campaign, Facebook removes the pages targeted

Deleted
 Deleted

learned — young women do want their voices heard, they just need a platform to do it. We're here, we're engaged, and we sure as hell don't have a stalled movement. Our hundreds of thousands of readers every month at this blog alone is proof of that.

The next morning, the Senator called her personally to discuss her remarks. It was a powerful moment for her, and an honor that Senator Gillibrand had, in fact, heard and valued a young woman's voice. The Senator's staff and Vanessa now speak regularly about issues facing women and various strategies for engaging and empowering them.

CREATING SPACE FOR RADICAL LEARNING

The feminist movement isn't without its complicated history. Combating racism, homophobia, classism, and other forms of oppression within feminist communities is a decades-old struggle that is far from over. But the Internet has allowed for a more open space of accountability and learning, helping to push mainstream feminism to be less monolithic.

Professor and theorist Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” in 1989 as a recognition of the intersecting and overlapping identities that women hold, contributing to varied experiences of oppression. Intersectionality is today a well-known and often-discussed theory of practice within the online feminist world.

A lot of feminist dialogue online has focused on recognizing the complex ways that privilege shapes our approach to work and community. Andrea Plaid of [Racialicious](#) spoke at the convening of the unaccounted for labor of constantly educating people with white privilege about racial justice issues. She said: “What we need is more white allies [to challenge racism online]... continue to come get your people, without excuse.”

One powerful example of this dialogue is the wave of online conversations among women of color online that emerged from the increased attention to “SlutWalk” marches in the mainstream media. “SlutWalks” began in Toronto following a police officer's statement that women should avoid acting like “sluts” as an act of rape prevention. Women around the world protested the idea that women's safety should be tied to their appearance, but the choice by some to reclaim the word “slut” as a rallying cry was not universally embraced. Many felt that the word held a different valence for women of color than for white women and that the experiences of women of color were not being included or respected by protest organizers. This was amplified when a picture was shared of an offensive protest sign that a white woman was holding at New York City's SlutWalk, quoting John Lennon and Yoko Ono's song, “Woman is the N----r of the World.” The incident sparked emboldened, necessary conversations about racism within the feminist movement, and the women of color who felt that the movement didn't identify with many of their lived experiences. The author of the [QueerBlackFeminist blog](#) wrote:

I don't think the intent of the organizers of Slutwalk has ever been to trivialize rape, I firmly believe that. Nonetheless, intent is of dire importance at this time. Or the ignorance of the real differences and experience of “womanhood,” and the intersections of race, class, gender, sex, sexuality and violence that structure the lives of women of color will continue to be a dividing line in feminist movement.

I am hopeful that we will keep these conversations, these critiques, open.

As people continue to hold one another accountable, as open and honest dialogue persists, as blogs written by diverse voices establish wider and wider audiences, the way we approach feminist activism and leadership is changing.

THE URGENCY OF NOW

NONPROFIT ORGANIZING IN THE MARGINS

Online organizing is a relatively new field of work, and as such, we are still struggling to establish sustainable infrastructure. For nonprofits like Ultraviolet, Hollaback!, and SPARK Movement, who manage to raise some operating support, funding isn't coming fast enough (or enough, period). "We've had to hustle really hard for every dollar, in part because most foundations just don't have a portfolio that we can fit into," says Hollaback! co-founder and Executive Director Emily May. Although Hollaback! has 250 leaders organizing online and on land across the world, the organization has only two full-time members of staff to support their organizers.

Currently, no women's foundations have initiatives specifically dedicated to online feminist work. There are those who have portfolios committed to funding "nontraditional feminist work," like the incredible FRIDA, a fund that supports young feminists in youth-led organizing. But no major foundation or women's fund has intentionally and explicitly developed a portfolio for online feminist organizations and initiatives.

This is despite a rapidly growing women's philanthropic movement; in 2009, there was \$1.5 billion in philanthropic spending on women's rights and health issues. That number may sound huge, particularly to those in the online feminist space who have been so starved for funding, but keep in mind that there is an even larger layer of concern here. The AARP, alone, spends \$1.2 billion in funding every year—almost equal to the entire domestic women's funding space. The Salvation Army, alone, has a spending budget of \$3 billion—literally doubling the numbers going to girls and women's issues.⁶

Many online feminist organizations aren't structured as independent nonprofits, but instead have fiscal sponsors: nonprofit organizations that will provide legal and tax-exempt status to entities through serving as an umbrella organization. This arrangement comes at a double financial burden. "We've been paying 6-7% of every donation to our fiscal sponsor. With such a small income stream, it really matters," says Jaclyn Friedman, Executive Director of Women, Action & the Media (WAM!). Friedman manages to pay solely herself a few hours per day to work from her dining room table.



Hollaback! is a movement to end street harassment powered by a network of local activists around the world, working together to better understand street harassment, to ignite public conversations, and to develop innovative strategies to ensure equal access to public spaces.

IMPACT

Trained **250** leaders running chapters in **62** cities and **25** countries; influenced policy change by meeting with over **250** policymakers, educated over **2,500** youth, and conducted groundbreaking research on street harassment in **20** cities.

FUNDING

Number of countries they're funded to be in: **1**

RESOURCES

350 square feet in office space and **3** laptops

WAGES

of fulltime paid staff members their yearly budget allows: **2**

6. Unpublished *Follow the Money* report from Women Moving Millions.

THE BAND-AID BUSINESS STRUCTURE

Feminist blogs and for-profit online organizations each have our own story of struggle behind why we haven't been able to develop a sustainable infrastructure, but there's one problem that's common: most of us have what we call "the band-aid business structure"; we operate as LLCs or sole proprietorships, relying on third party advertising or random fundraising drives to pay for server costs and other technical fees. Otherwise, many of us work full-time elsewhere, or rely on social media consulting or speaking engagements as temporary sources of income to supplement our free labor.

Feminist blogs are the least sustained entities within online feminism. Daily website and editorial maintenance generally requires at least one person to be behind a highly active blog every day, as well as general management of media inquiries, organizational partnerships, and advertisements. But ad revenue, even earned by the highest trafficked blogs, can't begin to cover this work. Feministing, which has a readership of over half a million every month, made just \$30,000 in 2011, so imagine the number of readers needed to support a movement with this model.

Unfortunately, many of the more lucrative revenue models that organizations have adopted elsewhere online come at a cost, and raise difficult ethical questions for feminist blogs. While large sites like Jezebel make money on amassing lucrative page views, the mission of feminist blogs is to send people *away* from our sites to take action, not trap them there. Many of us don't want corporate sponsorship from companies that are antithetical to our mission, and don't want to sell our devoted

readers' emails to third-party companies. Even one of the biggest success stories of an online social justice organization, Change.org, recently changed its policy to accept right-wing and conservative petitions for the sake of sustaining and expanding the company.

CROWDFUNDING

Since one of the most powerful things about online feminism is its community, online activists often reach out to their constituencies for funding, whether it be to help pay for their website server costs or a specific project they're trying to jump start. This strategy has been termed "crowdfunding," where money is raised online in a collaborative effort for an organization, individual, or project.

Feminist video blogger Anita Sarkeesian started a campaign on the popular crowdfunding website Kickstarter to raise \$6,000 to create videos about depictions of women in video games for her Feminist Frequency series. After being attacked by misogynist trolls who vandalized her Wikipedia page, hacked her website, and sent her death and rape threats, her online fans rallied to support her and her project, ultimately raising nearly \$160,000.

Queer Nigerian Afrofeminist writer and media activist Spectra raised over \$10,000 for her social media and communications training for African women's and LGBT organizations.⁷ Miriam Zoila Perez raised over \$4,000 for her self-authored "The Radical Doula Guide," a booklet inspired by her blog Radical Doula that addresses the political context of supporting people during pregnancy and childbirth. These examples, and so many more, demonstrate that crowdfunding can be an effective way

7. Corrected 04/12/13: Spectra was originally incorrectly referred to as an "online activist"

for individuals, collectives, or institutions to raise money while circumventing the need for nonprofit status, which many online feminists don't have.

It's far from a systemic or sustainable solution, however. Chances are that none of the activists mentioned above will be going to their communities for support again anytime soon, assuming they've essentially "tapped" their networks.

Crowdfunding is great for discrete projects—a video series, a training, a book—but doesn't lend itself well to creating the infrastructure needed to sustain online organizations. Additionally, the larger a project is, the harder it is to reach the fundraising goal: Only 38% of \$10,000 projects on Kickstarter, the most popular crowdfunding site, reach their goal, and that rate drops drastically as the goal gets higher.⁸

MEMBERSHIP AND SUBSCRIPTION MODEL

In counter-point to the foundation and crowd-funding strategies to raise funds, a membership model allows supporters to give funds to online activists that are not project directed. This allows these organizations the freedom to be flexible in their activities with the stability of a constant income stream.

MoveOn, one of the most well known progressive online nonprofits, follows this membership model; the average donation to MoveOn.org Political Action, according to their site, is less than \$20. Women, Action, & the Media (WAM!) is also funded through this system, offering discounts and benefits in exchange for a \$45 fee.

A variation on membership is the subscription model common to content producers. A number of media outlets provide enhanced online access for an annual fee, such as *Bitch Magazine*.

But many online platforms balk at the idea of sequestering their content and providing it only to paying customers. And anyone relying on ongoing donations runs a risk that those donations could disappear at any time. Because most membership models are built on a monthly or yearly system, long term planning can be extremely difficult.

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Online feminism may continue to grow and evolve, but whether it will reach the potential it needs to sustain itself—and make the real, transformative impact the world needs—is yet to be seen. An unfunded online feminist movement isn't merely a threat to the livelihood of these hard-working activists, but a threat to the larger feminist movement itself. Without greater support, the online feminist movement faces a number of risks.

We will remain reactive and myopic.

"[Online feminists] kind of are aware of what each other is doing and maybe they will sometimes check in with each other. But there's no strategic planning, the way there would be in a communications division of an organization or of a corporation or of a traditional institution. There's no team-building [around feminist blogging], which I think is playing a really critical role that's never really been done before, in my experience. There's no retreats. There's no sense of shared mission outside of anything that's completely voluntary. And there's no supporting of each other, in an institutionalized sense."

—Lori Adelman, *Feministing*

8. Mitroff, Sarah. "4 Keys to a Winning Kickstarter Campaign." *Wired Magazine*, 2012. www.wired.com/business/2012/07/kickstarter/

DEBATING THE NONPROFIT MODEL

For some online feminists, becoming a 501c3 nonprofit isn't just a logistical hurdle, but an ethical dilemma. Those gathered at our June 7th meeting spent time discussing the history of the traditional nonprofit structure and its widely acknowledged structural failings.

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence's anthology, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond The Nonprofit Industrial Complex*, makes an argument for the many ways in which the nonprofit/NGO model has done a disservice to social justice movements. While the reasons are numerous, one major premise is that the nonprofit/foundation dynamic stifles real organizing power. The nonprofit lens of career-based modes of organizing instead of mass-based organizing, can create a culture of dependency where organizations spend more time applying for grants and proving "funding worthiness" to foundations rather than working to build a broad, populist base and create systemic change.

"We as activists are no longer accountable to our constituents or members because we don't depend on them for our existence," says Adjoa Florência Jones de Almeida of Sista II Sista in her essay. "Instead, we've become primarily accountable to public and private foundations as we try to prove to them that we are still relevant and efficient and thus worthy of continued funding."

This dynamic is particularly pernicious for small, grassroots organizations led by, and working in, historically marginalized communities. These organizers have to work especially hard to create productive philanthropic relationships because those with financial resources aren't organically part of their communities. Learning how to fundraise can be like visiting a foreign country, where everything from the language to the rituals to the expectations are new. The codes of power must be learned and this takes time away from the mission of the organizations, not to mention a psychic toll.

Others argued that getting paid for our labor is a fundamental feminist value, that we shouldn't respond to long histories in which labor has been extracted from various groups of people for little or no remuneration by continuing to provide that labor without pay.

Another facet of this debate, recently re-popularized by fundraiser Dan Pallotta's TED talk (as of this writing, viewed over a million times), is the lack of funding available to strengthen nonprofit organizations' general infrastructure. Pallotta argues that the current assumption that charities, unlike for-profit entities, should operate on as small an operating budget as possible, is precisely what is preventing the sector from having the impact it should be having. He writes, "We have to re-train people - especially leaders and program officers at foundations (who have rightly grown weary of charity dependence on them.) They believe philanthropy is not sustainable or scalable in and of itself. It is, and it's likely to generate far more massive revenues than any other scheme, if enough money is invested in fundraising staff and resources to promote it."

Any model that we take up will have its limits and can, over time become as much a part of the problem as of the solution. But that also can't be a deterrent from attempting to forge generative relationships across boundaries, sharing resources, knowledge, and passion at a moment where our alienation from one another only perpetuates inequality that harms all of us. There is no pure strategy in pursuit of social justice in such a complex world; there is, instead, a need for awareness, transparency about the cultural and economic complexities, and a commitment to forge ahead, anyway.

THE RISKS

“Strains have been starting to show and most of them are financial in nature. It’s really easy to spend so much time on Racialicious and then realize you haven’t pulled in any paid work for that week, so rent is going to be rough next month. A lot of people get so burned out in the process of producing, creating and engaging, that the emotional tolls are super high.”

—Latoya Peterson, Editor of Racialicious

“Blogging has become the third shift. You do your activist work, you have a job to make money and then you blog on top of that. It’s completely unsupported.”

—Samhita Mukhopadhyay,
Executive Editor of Feministing.com



What’s at stake: The risks of an unfunded online feminist movement

- 1 Reactive instead of pro-active
- 2 Myopic instead of long-term strategizing
- 3 Privileges the privileged
- 4 Anti-feminists will leverage the internet
- 5 A high burnout rate
- 6 Repeats the same tired story of the exhausted, underpaid activists

In spite of the powerful successes of online feminists, our stories of impact have a disappointing common trend: they’re almost all reactive and short-term. The lack of infrastructure and sustainability for the online feminist movement makes it nearly impossible to think about more meaningful, long-term strategizing. More than ever, we need to create effective proactive campaigns and policies to prevent sexist encroachments in the first place, rather than being in a perpetual state of pushback.

There will be an incredibly high burnout rate.

In April 2012, one of the largest global feminist blogs online, [Gender Across Borders](#), ceased operating. After three years of collaboration with international organizations and companies, offering over 30,000 readers feminist analysis and global activism opportunities every month, founder Emily Fillingham and the team of editors decided it was just too difficult to maintain. “Unfortunately, none of us could afford to keep it up. We made a lot of progress in just a few years, but it still wasn’t enough to earn us any funding,” said editor Colleen Hodgetts. And they’re not the first; dozens of underpaid, overworked and exhausted online activists have left the movement, their voices lost and the mix—as a result—much less rich.

An unfunded movement further privileges the privileged.

“You’re not just doing intellectual labor. You’re also doing emotional labor when you come out with these...vulnerable posts about... how we like the world to look. As women of color specifically, a lot of that gets internalized and it creates other kinds of issues. Health challenges. Internalized stress. Not being validated.”

—Brittney Cooper, *Crunk Feminist Collective*

If we don’t support this work, the most privileged in the online movement—those who already have the resources and time to blog every day, and do organizing work for free—will have the most amplified voices. Women of color and other groups are already overlooked for adequate media attention and already struggle disproportionately in this culture of scarcity. If feminist movements don’t create supportive spaces, the leadership pipeline will grow smaller and more insular, and fewer voices will get promoted.

Anti-feminists will leverage the Internet.

Misogyny, both blatant and covert, is rampant online. Online harassment and threats are a daily experience for online activists, and young women and girls are increasingly bombarded with vitriolic and harmful messaging on the very same forums we use for activism. Radically anti-feminist commentator Ann Coulter has over 300,000 followers on Twitter —four times the number of followers as Planned Parenthood. Pinterest—the social networking site of 17 million visits per day⁹—has become immersed in diet tips and images of Victoria Secret models¹⁰. Anti-feminist video bloggers outnumber feminists in search results for “feminist” on YouTube. Not only is it up to us to build our influence and challenge the sexism and bigotry that exists online, but also to continue to provide safe spaces for young people to engage with one another in healthy and empowering ways.

We'll repeat the same mistakes.

“If the gender identities were different, it would be a different conversation. How do we combat all of the things in our socialization that teach us that we don't deserve sustainability? We have to embrace the entitlement of saying -- ‘No, I deserve these things, and I need them and I'm not going to wait for someone to hand them to me.’”
—Miriam Zoila Perez, *Radical Doula*

The “psychology of deprivation” we speak of is not a new phenomenon for feminist activists. We acknowledge that historically, the feminist movement has not valued its own labor. It has largely depended on unpaid work, slowly evolving into exhaustion

and eventual burnout. We believe this is a huge part of what's been holding the movement back from creating the real policy and structural change it needs. We pass this model down to the young women and girls who look up to us: that it's necessary to work for free, and to risk our physical and mental health, and our relationships in order to make change. We convince them that these martyr-like sacrifices are “heroic” and “inspiring,” when, in fact, we know they've only been harmful to our well-being, and to the movement. We must create a new culture of work, a vibrant and valued feminist economy that could resolve an issue that's existed for waves before us—and create a more hopeful legacy for the generations to come.

WHAT'S NEEDED NOW?

To avoid these pitfalls and embrace the opportunities ahead, the online community will have to be strategic and partner with a range of their feminist allies—advocacy and nonprofit organizations, philanthropists and entrepreneurs, corporate leadership with a feminist sensibility, educators, community organizers, artists, and youth—among so many others. It is time to strengthen the connective tissue between those who are most savvy and connected online, and those pushing feminist agendas in our courtrooms, classrooms, boardrooms, and beyond. The results could be profound.

Making a movement visible

The Internet has become a laboratory for movement leadership. Young people, poor people, women with disabilities, queer women of color, those who

9. <http://mbaonline.com/a-day-in-the-internet/>

10. <http://buzzfeed.com/amyodell/how-pinterest-is-killing-feminism>

identify as transgender, and a wide variety of others often left out of mainstream media narratives have a chance to tell their own stories and link these stories to larger cultural and political realities online.

When writing for collective blogs or organizing online petitions and ancillary “on land” actions, they can learn—trial by fire—how to strategize and operationalize action with a team, how to mobilize masses or manage a membership/readership base, how to plan events, how to come up with a media strategy, including messaging, how to fundraise, how to manage organizational finances, how to handle conflict, criticism, failure, and disappointment, how to be resilient, how to provide peer support, etc.

It’s tempting to try to identify specific individuals who embody today’s leadership. High-profile writers get a lot of attention in the mainstream media because symbolic leadership is effective—it’s a simple story. An identifiable leader can become part of the public consciousness in a way that a collective movement struggles to. This kind of “sticky” story—clean, clear, codified—gives the movement and its ideologies and goals a chance to travel beyond the echo chamber. The public—particularly the uninitiated—have a much easier time latching on to the emotional story of one individual than they do a complex movement.

But, symbolic leadership is dangerous. It not only puts the weight of a movement on one person’s shoulders, making everyone more vulnerable, but it almost inevitably colludes with the very forces that the movement is trying to fight.

Feminists are well aware of this problem. After all, there has been far too much ink spilled and time spent on the question, “Who is the next Gloria Steinem?” Despite the fact that writer and activist Gloria Steinem

has worked hard to highlight other feminist voices, especially those of women of color, she is consistently pointed to by mainstream media sources as “the face” of so-called “second wave” feminism. A frustrated Steinem once responded to a variation on the above question—who do you think is the next Gloria Steinem?—from *The New York Times* with “I don’t think there should have been a first one.”

It’s a shallow and archaic framing for a fascinating and necessary conversation. In a decentralized movement (or even multiple movements), how can we push our stories out into the world without limiting them?

It’s also no coincidence that Steinem is white, cisgender, upper-middle class, able-bodied and headquartered in an American urban center, as are most of the visible symbols of feminist activism in the mainstream. However complex and diverse our approaches to leadership might be, these women are accessible to mainstream media, in part, because they don’t challenge the status quo. Meanwhile, our entire movement is about disrupting and transforming the status quo.

There could be no more obvious demonstration of this dynamic than the Occupy Wall Street movement, in which the mainstream media continually begged organizers to anoint a spokesperson. It would have made their jobs easier. The Occupy movement’s refusal, and their creative thinking around alternatives to symbolic leadership—namely the use of language (“the 99%”), corresponding social media campaigns, and other kinds of symbolic acts—should serve as inspiration for the contemporary feminist movement’s continued effort to prioritize collective leadership.

Turning visibility and voice into influence

A recent report¹¹ by The MacArthur Research Network on Youth and Participatory Politics points to some significant nuances when it comes to the leadership potential of online feminism. The report details new forms of participatory politics and an “expanded set of participatory practices” that youth are using, most notably online tools. Importantly, the researchers find that young people of a wide range of demographic backgrounds are using the Internet to build what they call “digital social capital,” and in fact, with engagement highest among black youth.

But lest we suggest that online feminism is the leadership utopia we’ve all been waiting for, it’s critical to consider exactly how well-linked the personal and the political really are. The report reads:

There is a risk that proponents of participatory politics, including youth themselves, will fail to focus on the distinction between voice and influence. We should be clear: we do not want to undervalue the significance of voice, especially for youth who are in the process of developing their political identities. At the same time, we recognize that the promise of a democratic society is predicated on the belief that political actors have more than voice. They must also have influence. As Henry Milner has argued, ‘Generations that turn their backs on politics in favor of individual expression will continue to find their priorities at the top of society’s wish list—and at the bottom of the ‘to do’ list.’

It’s hard to imagine a more accurate summary of the political climate we’ve found ourselves in these last few years. The feminist movement has, in some ways, never been more diverse in either its participants or its methodologies nor had as many different kinds of outlets for feminist voices, and yet we find our priorities at the bottom of the “to do list.” Why?

According to the logic of this cutting-edge study, perhaps our problem partly lies in the disconnection between voice and influence in the contemporary feminist movement. The Internet provides endless opportunities for people, the young and marginalized especially, to begin to find, exercise, and strengthen their voices. But it does not offer the kinds of support necessary for this cacophonous chorus of individual voices to come together into an influential feminist force. That kind of effectiveness would require more connections among media and between online and on-the-ground activists, as well as the institutional resources to foster and build the connections.

This is not to suggest, importantly, that exercising one’s voice alone, testifying to one’s experiences, amplifying one’s ideas, are not valid in and of themselves. Mainstream cultures have historically and routinely marginalized diverse voices to undercut effectiveness, and bringing them to new audiences is no small success. But, we can also attend to the possibility that there is both an opportunity for using our voices to individually “take up space” and also coordinate our expression in such a way that we dismantle the oppressive structures that made it so hard to do so in the first place.

11. http://ypp.dmlcentral.net/sites/all/files/publications/YPP_Survey_Report_FULLL.pdf

Creating digital infrastructure

It follows that the marginalized young leaders who have found their voices online—while juggling multiple jobs, poverty, and a variety of other stressors—might be more likely to find their influence in the world if the movement intentionally invested in them and gave them the space and time necessary to organize.

This means that what has sometimes been cast as a personal failing on the part of young feminists by writers analyzing the generational rifts within feminism, is actually a problem of inadequate infrastructure. While the third and even the fourth waves of feminism have been characterized as self-focused, mistaking identity politics for real politics, we have been given very little support to link what we are experiencing everyday and writing about online with larger movement agendas. The MacArthur report points to exciting alternatives:

Intermediary organizations may benefit from considering ways that new kinds of digital infrastructure may support desired practices ranging from enabling dialog across difference, assessments of the credibility of information, media production, and mobilizing others...Promoting broad and equitable access to the support, training, and infrastructure needed to move from voice to influence will be important in order for participatory politics to reach its full potential.

Online feminism can be an entry point for deeper feminist engagement, but our maximum impact will be achieved by thinking creatively and ambitiously about the infrastructure needed to link voice and influence. For example, rather than spend precious philanthropic dollars on new initiatives aimed at speaking to the “next generation,” the women’s

funding movement has an exciting opportunity to invest in basic operating support for the variety of places where online feminists already spend time—blogs, online petitions popularized through Facebook and Twitter, apps like [Hollaback!](#) and [Circle of Six](#). With support, these spaces and the leaders that built and sustain them will be able to make more strategic decisions about their content, their campaigns, and the ways in which they coordinate with the wider movement.

With the time and space afforded by institutional support, financial security, and connections to each other and to existing institutions these activists will be able to have a broader impact—reaching wider and deeper to introduce young people to the ways gender impacts their lives as well as the lives of people all over the world. Armed with the variety of new online tools that exist, action will follow consciousness.

Building capacity and sustainability

While online feminism has organically become a powerful pipeline for young leaders within the feminist movement, it isn’t adequate in and of itself. Those who have come of age online do gain innumerable, valuable skills, as outlined above, but there are some areas of expertise that don’t organically come with online participation. It is time that we focused more on what these missing capacities are and create dynamic opportunities for leadership development.

One of the most obvious missing capacities of this generation of online leaders is organizational know-how. Young women involved in online activism have mostly eschewed learning about organizational structure (nonprofit, for profit, new hybrid models),

A New Digital Age for Education

The Internet's role in participatory politics among youth is also being increasingly nurtured in our classrooms. Online feminist discourse has broadened the scope of what constitutes feminist curricula. Feminist blogs are being integrated into course syllabi and many online feminist influencers come speak to women's studies programs and even teach students. Cutting-edge academic research on the intersections of feminism, technology, and engagement have exploded in the last decade.

But it's not just college-level educators that are influencing and being influenced by online feminism. Ileana Jiménez is a New York City high school teacher and feminist blogger who has brought education and online activism together in innovative ways through her classroom. Her students developed a class blog, *F to the Third Power*, after being given the space, education, online resources, and real world experiences of feminist activism. They've contributed posts over the course of the last two years, sharing their individual visions for feminism and their reflections on their first forays into intersectional activism. In the meantime, Ileana works online and off to bring attention to the gap that exists between K-12 education and feminist discourse.

Ileana is joined by many educators and students exploring ways to use digital tools to incorporate feminist materials in their educational experiences. Another convening member, Dena Simmons, pointed to the importance of "collective impact"—building a culture that encourages bridging conversations inside and outside of schools, and finding more spaces for educators and activists to work together to figure out how to create a two-way dialogue between the classroom and online discussions. Many high-school aged youth are leading the way, in formal programs or through their own discovery. The *Black Youth Project*, a blog hosted by the University of Chicago, provides a platform where "black youth can speak for themselves about the issues that concern them," including prominent posts about gender and sexuality. In Seattle, non-profit *Reel Grrls* provides media arts training to girls with a focus on developing feminist videos that can be shared online, and in Los Angeles, grassroots summer program *ImMEDIAtate Justice* empowers young women to share their experience of reproductive justice through films, which then become online resources.

The proliferation of curriculum and extracurricular online feminist experiences for teen girls isn't just a U.S. phenomenon either. Kat Banyard, the founder of a British group serving teen feminists called *UK Feminista*, described school as "the new front line of feminism" recently in *The Guardian*. British teens have recently declared victory after successfully pressuring Lego to drop its association with *The Sun*, a publication known for featuring objectifying photographs of women.

But while the impact of thought leadership and feminist pedagogy has clearly made a mark, the lack of resources and support leaves too many educators struggling to fill the gap. As a member of the convening, Ileana said, "Educators are finding the blog. I've received emails from Israel, South Africa, England, and even emails from educators down the block. They're writing to me. They're asking for advice. They're asking for help."

financial systems, and revenue development, and instead focused their energies entirely on doing the work—creating content, relationships, and community.

This is the right instinct expressed in the wrong way. It's noble that young feminists have so wholeheartedly embraced their mission to create feminist analysis and advocacy online; it's tragic that we have done so without the support necessary to also shore up sustainable, even if lean, new feminist organizations. It should be noted that gender differences clearly play out online, as they do on land, when it comes to sustainability; male bloggers in comparable spaces have tended to spend much more energy on ramping up revenue generation and/or fundraising in order to make their work sustainable. Women, with very few exceptions, have not. As Courtney Martin outlined in *The Nation* in 2012:

Many feminists innovated remarkably early on in the Internet's existence, founding blogs and online communities, but we've largely stalled in progress over the last few years because we are under-resourced and overwhelmed.
Samhita Mukhopadhyay, the executive editor

of Feministing.com, explains, "Blogging has become the third shift. You do your activist work, then you have a job to make money and then you blog on top of that. It's completely unsupported."

Other missing capacities for so many young feminists are strategic planning and coalition building. Too often online feminists work within silos, lacking the time, support, skills, and vehicles necessary to reach across various borders and work strategically together for long-term gains. Having a big picture plan and pulling in allies from various sectors to collaborate on it feels like a luxury when you are just trying to get content up that day, or make sure there is enough money in the bank account to buy the teen girl bloggers pizza at a training. There are beautiful friendships that have grown out of the online feminist world, but they are rarely leveraged for the next level of broad base-building.

We need to create more spaces and times where strategy and collaboration are prioritized, supported, and expected, and where feminists of all ages—but especially the young and online—have a chance to do the profound work of dreaming together.

OUR HIGHER IMPACT FUTURE

RE-IMAGINING OUR FUTURE

So how do we make the powerful new tools, unprecedented interconnectivity, and inspired leadership sustainable? How do we coordinate and strategize such a decentralized movement? How do we seize this exciting moment and have the most impact possible?

These are complex questions and we won't pretend to have simple answers. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the challenges that face the contemporary feminist movement, but there are a variety of viable innovations and interventions that we will outline, in hopes that charismatic leaders will adopt and adapt them. Many programs currently exist that can provide powerful models when applied to online feminists, while in other cases we may need to create entirely new structures to support this unique movement.

One thing is clear: it's time that online innovators ask for what they need. We've proven that these tools work, and that our spontaneous, culturally-attuned way of deploying them makes a difference, and it's time to stand confidently in that knowledge and ask for the resources and skills and collaborations that will create fundamental change.

CREATING NEW SPACES FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING

“What do we need most? I think, frankly, and this is less about Digital Democracy and more about the world that I want to live in—I think, open and honest dialogue and conversations. Of course, we need funding—but that I want to come from open and honest conversations with funders about what we actually do with the money, rather than trying to fit into frameworks that somebody else decides. And coming from a place of wealth and privilege

decides, versus an honest conversation about where money really should go and how it should be used.”

—Emily Jacobi, Digital Democracy

If we are going to leverage the unprecedented power of online feminism for the greatest impact, we have to take the time and find the space to strategize cross generation, organization, and sector.

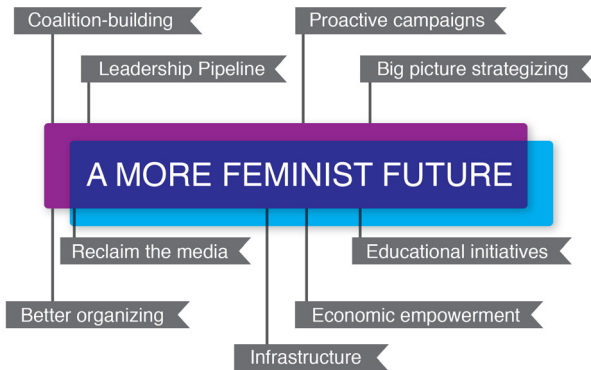
Importantly, we are not calling for another women's conference. TEDxWomen, Women in the World, BlogHer, the Omega Women & Power Conference, WAM!, and so many more, are fantastic opportunities to honor leaders, spark inspiration, and amplify ideas, but they are often not effective spaces to dream, plan, and coordinate among the activists working within the movement.

We call for an **annual #FemFuture meeting** of 100 online and on-the-ground organizers, philanthropists, educators, and public intellectuals interested in feminism online to strengthen collaborative relationships and learn from one another's experiences. This gathering could allow feminists to look at the year ahead and brainstorm issues, actions, and benchmarks that we can put our collective resources toward focusing on. This would also be a chance for organizations to eradicate redundancies and forge partnerships, funders to prioritize and respond in an agile way to on-the-ground needs, and online feminists to plot complementary communications and cultural change strategies.

For example, the convening could hold a *Feminist Theory of Change Exchange* involving moderated conversations about how to enact change, working to build empathy and perspective, embrace productive dissent, and emerge with a deeper foundation for our work together. Another might be Feminist Solutions

THE OPPORTUNITY

Benefits of investing in online feminism



It's time to create a more feminist future.

Join the movement at [#femfuture](https://www.onlinefeminism.com) [onlinefeminism.com](https://www.onlinefeminism.com)

Working Sessions where institutional leaders and on- and offline organizers discuss new organizing tactics, draw from case studies of successful social movements, and develop measurable, pro-active solutions for the coming year. Other sessions and forums could be developed based on what the most pressing issues are that year, whether it's cultivating new leadership development or creating new strategies for cross-movement building.

We may be Internet evangelists, but the convening on June 7th was a striking reminder of just how critical face-to-face dialogue and collaboration is between feminist activists. This annual occurrence would not function to try to institutionalize online feminists, or designate who the "real" leaders are. But it could serve as a space for us to make plans, give

and get feedback, and figure out how to best support one another. By putting a diverse group of people together who share the common passion of gender equality, we are confident that spontaneous and organic collaborations will take root.

Sharing resources and people power

"I have a problem doing anything on a white dude model, because my reality is so far from that. When they coalition build, they look like they're collaborating, but they're actually consolidating power and money. It's not just about money. How do we skill share? Bartering is the thing we do when the revolution comes. Hell, this is the revolution."

—Brittney Cooper, *Crunk Feminist Collective*

When each online feminist has to purchase her own domain name, figure out the design for his own blog, recruit advertisers or copyeditors, and find her own space to work, it takes up a lot of time and energy. Luckily, one of the things the web has enabled is large-scale sharing. Companies like Zip Car operate on the assumption that if you can have access to something when you need it, you don't really need to own it. Similarly, when feminists can share resources, they all benefit. Many have already begun to create partnerships for content-sharing, combining projects, sharing of work spaces, and joint hiring of staff.

The next step is to make sharing even easier. Using simple online tools, feminists could embed opportunities through **FemSource** to offer a skill or request a skill in exchange for expertise another party has. Several websites exist for bartering skills and objects, but feminists could all focus on creating mutually beneficial exchanges within our communities. For example, one feminist video website may need someone to write descriptions for their

videos, while a feminist blogger would like someone to create a video series—a perfect opportunity to swap skills, where each person is compensated for their labor without requiring money. This could also be an opportunity for feminist activists all over the globe to connect around best practices, sharing intelligence and tactics, and build international solidarity.

Developing capacity

As has long been recognized, business and technology are two areas where women are often woefully underrepresented; less than 20 percent of the bachelor's degrees in computer science in the U.S. go to women, and women CEOs make up for only 3.6% of Fortune 500 companies¹². But the silver lining is that women-owned businesses are on the rise, and now make up nearly 30% of businesses¹³ in the U.S. The number of women-owned companies with 100 or more employees has increased at nearly twice the growth rate of all other companies. The time couldn't be better to create a new feminist innovation economy. Thinking creatively about using business to develop innovative technology in the name of gender equity could be a game-changer not only for the feminist movement, but could change the landscape for the tech gender gap, where women are largely creating the business *and* the technology.

Building skills and literacies in business is critical for feminists working online. Thus far, most online feminist organizations haven't successfully generated enough revenue to support themselves, largely because of a lack of expertise and time for research

and development. So not surprisingly, many of those who gathered at our convening expressed a desire to develop their business acumen through training opportunities. This kind of large-scale capacity building can happen through the creation of short-term intensive workshops, actively matching online feminists with existing training opportunities, and building long-term online networks for mentoring and support.

Two potential programs could increase the financial literacy and business skills for online feminists. **A Feminist Business Bootcamp** would be a weeklong opportunity for bloggers and organizers to come together to learn about business and financial structures from leading experts, examine social business case studies, such as Change.org and Purpose, and get preliminary training in fundraising and development. If one feminist blog of hundreds of thousands of readers could be given the skills and resources needed to grow their business and capital, just think about how many more people could be reached, and how much more impact made.

The second, **#FemFuture Innovation Accelerator**, would provide longer-term support, where blogs and online organizers could apply to be part of a four to 12 month program in which they would get an initial start-up budget, business training, pro bono strategy and planning support, mentorship, and introductions to potential investors and supporters. One of the most well-known start-up accelerators, Y Combinator, until recently had given only 4 percent¹⁴ of their grants to startups with a female founder. While many women leave or

12. http://huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/07/fortune-500-female-ceos_n_1495734.html

13. <http://blogs.reuters.com/small-business/2012/10/03/women-owned-small-businesses-on-the-rise-but-obstacles-remain>

14. <http://foundersatwork.com/1/post/2011/1/what-stops-female-founders.html>

opt out of technology careers because of a working culture that's non-supportive of women, creating a pro-women start-up culture of innovation and social change could make a lasting impact in both technology and gender justice work.

Creating new structures for sustainability

"We sometimes sector ourselves up into tiny little silos and don't do coalition building or real partnership work. We need to figure out ways to get more strategic in working together without compromising our fundamental intersectional politics."

—Jennifer Pozner, *Women in Media & News*

Online feminist organizations must become more financially sustainable if they are to continue doing good work, and certainly if they are going to make their work truly transformative. This also means that we need to forge deep and genuine partnerships.

This kind of sustainability can be realized via nonprofit models—where support is most likely coming from foundations, members, or individual philanthropists, through for-profit models—where revenue is most likely coming from advertising, products like e-books and trainings, or some combination of the two.

One option in the for-profit model is impact investing. In order to get some of these revenue-generating ideas off the ground, venture capitalists could invest in the creation of tools that would have feminist benefits and could also make a profit. For example, an innovative iPhone app that increases health and safety might contain a framework for new forms of advertising. Such products could result in a triple bottom line for online feminist organizations.

In the philanthropic world, pioneers in the women's funding movement are looking to enliven and diversify when it comes to whom they invest in and how they

catalyze change; many have expressed a great interest in mobilizing younger generations. Online feminists are looking for sources of support, feminists with financial resources are interested in innovation and cultural change. With this powerful congruence in mind, we suggest the following:

- **Online feminist portfolios:** every foundation—whether community-based, corporate giving, or privately held—has an opportunity to develop a pipeline of funding specifically geared to support online feminist work. These portfolios must be structured with the pace and fluidity of online feminism in mind—not sticking to artificial grant cycles, but instead looking to support the general operating costs of online feminist organizing, allowing these innovators to do what they do best: respond in the moment with creativity and an eye for motivating action.
- **Grant making & matchmaking for collective impact:** philanthropic entities could connect online feminists—masters at communication and digital dissemination—with on-the-ground organizations that are doing fundamental feminist work. These links, with the right kind of support, could lead to dynamic campaigns, fostering both public awareness and citizen engagement on gender-related issues.
- **Fund for Online Feminist Innovation:** run by a rotating collective of online feminist veterans, the fund's leadership would evaluate proposals and distribute resources in line with their own wealth of experience and of knowledge. This collective could also serve to set the agenda, as they would determine which issues and types of online campaigns are most critical and viable

in light of upcoming legislative battles, cultural conversations and activist efforts.

- **Corporate Partnerships:** Online feminists need to recognize that our skills are useful, not just to each other, but also to corporations who have the financial resources to pay for this unique expertise. We need to establish and foster these cross-sector partnerships where corporations hire us to help them create blogging platforms, video, photo-sharing and other digital media that we have mastered. We understand that not every corporation's mission and operations would fit within the ethical and political framework that many online feminists demand of our partners, but there is still potential here for mutual benefit as evidenced by organizations like Purpose.
- **Self-care & Solidarity Retreats:** If we could ritualize coming together and creating time for reflection, healing, and community building among young feminist, our stamina for the movement will be greatly increased. Partnering with organizations that specialize in this kind of holistic leadership development will help online feminists disconnect from the rabid atmosphere of online organizing, in order to reconnect with renewed purpose and clarity.

From capacity to impact

The opportunities for collaboration are infinite, as are the possibilities for impact. All that remains is for us to connect the dots—between voice and influence, between the broad base and the tools, between the online organizers and the philanthropic innovators, between the policy goals and the savviest civic engagement strategies, between our present and our more feminist future.

We know that in order to develop the capacity to create lasting systemic change, we need to boldly embrace the tools that are at our fingertips. One individual who did this was President Barack Obama in the 2012 presidential election; just two months after the Komen Foundation story and other battles over women's rights went viral, the Obama campaign made a deliberate decision to target reproductive health issues, like Planned Parenthood funding and contraception, in order to maintain their support among women. And on Election Day, women were not only the majority of the electorate, but the country held an 18 percent gender gap—a historic record for the U.S.¹⁵

But President Obama had the financial support and people power necessary to strategize in the most effective way. If online activism affected the outcome of the presidential election, think about what it could do to change the tidal wave of state legislation that is slowly and painfully removing Americans' right to choose. Think about what it might do to change a culture that currently shames young women. Think about what it might do to release men from the expectations associated with toxic masculinity to be whole human beings. Think about what it might do to get the federal and workplace policies in place that would allow anyone to be both present parents and passionate workers. Think about how it might connect the growing feminist movements all over the world in order to act in concert, coordinated at last.

Our interdependent future

As feminists, we spend a lot of time focusing on pervasive injustices that keep girls and boys, women and men, from living their safest, most productive, and

15. <http://thenation.com/article/171279/feminists-win>

pleasurable lives. What we sometimes forget is that we are living in a time of unprecedented social change.

We are creating a cost for injustice. We are rewriting the story. We are mobilizing fundamental change.

There are tools at our disposal like never before. We've got the Internet to spread the word faster and father, to spark people to action. We've got reader and philanthropic fuel to spread the spark. We've got

power—both in numbers and, increasingly, in the formal leadership of many sectors.

To truly seize this moment, to really make the kind of change that will be irreversible, irrefutable, and breathtakingly beautiful, we must work together. We must share resources—cultural, financial, and otherwise—in order to make ourselves the strategic, sustainable movement that we are just now, becoming capable of being.