

Handbook of Feminist Research

Theory and Praxis



Editor
Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber



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READING BETWEEN THE LINES

Feminist Content Analysis Into the Second Millennium

SHULAMIT REINHARZ
RACHEL KULICK

In 1992, one of us published *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, a review and analysis of various feminist approaches to the major forms of research up to that point. Thirteen years later, the chapter devoted to content analysis is the one that needs most updating because the nature of "content" itself has changed so much in the intervening period (Reinharz, 1992a). In 1992 the information highway did not have off-ramps into everyone's computer; e-mail addresses were not part of everyone's business cards; and blogs, e-zines, instant messaging, and the myriad other forms of communication were still in the future. Today, information and imagery saturate contemporary Western society—and to a certain extent all societies, with the prospect of even deeper saturation to come with transnational flows of information in the form of television, music, Web sites, advertising, and print media; the sheer scope and range of content produced and consumed is almost incomprehensible. Developing methods for probing these forms and formats is a key challenge for feminist research. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that

a search on Google using the phrase "feminist content analysis" produces more than 2,000,000 entries.

Despite the upsurge in new communication formats, however, older media forms remain significant for feminist analysis, as well. Mainstream magazines are filled with sexualized imagery of young women, usually scantily clad, thin to an unhealthy degree, and highly concerned with appearance, beauty, and sexual abilities. These are the everyday images of silent women available to us for scrutiny. Movies and television portray popularized narratives of men as hypermasculine, active, heroic, violent, and often devoid of emotion other than rage or stoicism. Some independent films attempt to depict alternative constructions of gender and sexuality. People surf the Internet, cybershopping or cyberproducing their own content and counter-narratives through blogs, Web sites, chat rooms, and other virtual devices. People are out there communicating, viewing, buying, writing, working, learning, cooking, selling, dating—in other words, living. These discourses and the meanings embedded in them reflect and

transmit a wide range of norms and values regarding gender, sexuality, and social relations.

As mentioned above, given the wide expanse of easily accessible or produced information and the ubiquitous, yet diverse, messages about gender and sexuality, feminist scholarship in the area of content analysis is imperative. Fortunately, some work has begun. Feminist researchers seek to understand not only the meanings infused in cultural materials but also the contextual and social processes of cultural production and reader reception.

In this chapter, we examine the dynamic array of approaches to feminist content analysis at the start of the 21st century, with an eye toward analyses of systems of representation, interpretation, and identity construction. To accomplish this, we first explore what is “feminist” about feminist content analysis. Second, we examine the role of feminist content analyses in revealing the multilayered politics of gendered and sexualized representation in print media and imagery, as well as online forms. We then look to the online feminist communities in which feminist knowledge is being produced and studied.

WHAT IS *FEMINIST* ABOUT FEMINIST CONTENT ANALYSIS?

Sociologists, historians, literary analysts, anthropologists, and archeologists, among others—whether feminist or not—employ content analysis to study cultural materials as something produced by people. These products stem from every aspect of human life, including relatively private worlds, “high” culture, popular culture (Goldsen, 1974; Haskell, 1973; Mellon, 1973; Newcomb, 1974; Tuchman, Daniels, & Benet, 1978), and organizational life. Cultural artifacts are the products of individual activity, social organization, technology, and cultural patterns. The only limit to what can be considered a cultural artifact—and thus used as a “text” for research—is the researcher’s imagination. People who study cultural materials or artifacts employ a systematic approach by counting, coding, or interpreting a set of identified themes contained in the content.

There is no general consensus for the terminology of this type of work. Sociologists tend to

use the term *content analysis*; historians, the term *archival research*; and philosophers and students of literature, the terms *text analysis* or *literary criticism* (Millet, 1970; Petraka & Tilly, 1983). Different disciplines also apply a variety of interpretive frameworks to the analysis of cultural artifacts. Discourse analysis, rhetoric analysis, and deconstruction are additional terms that refer to the examination of texts.

With respect to feminist content analysis, by and large, studies focus both on the interpretation of the content and on its juxtaposition in the larger sociopolitical context. Nineteenth-century Harriet Martineau (1838/1988)—arguably the first sociologist—and 20th-century Rose Weitz (1977) extol the value of studying “things” or “cultural products” as a promising approach for understanding social arrangements:

To arrive at the facts of the condition of a people through the discourse of individuals, is a hopeless enterprise. . . . The grand secret of wise inquiry into Morals and Manners is to begin with the study of THINGS, using the DISCOURSE OF PERSONS as a commentary upon them. (Martineau, 1838/1988, p. 73)

The cultural products of any given society at any given time reverberate with the themes of that society and that era (Weitz, 1977, p. 194).

Onboard a ship preparing to study the United States in 1834, Harriet Martineau wrote:

The eloquence of Institutions and Records, in which the action of the nation is embodied . . . , is more comprehensive and more faithful than that of any variety of individual voices. The voice of a whole people goes up in the silent workings of an institution; the condition of the masses is reflected from the surface of a record. . . . The records of any society . . . whether architectural remains, epitaphs, civic registers, national music, or any other of the thousand manifestations of the common mind which may be found among every people, afford more information on Morals in a day than converse with individuals in a year. (1838/1998, pp. 73–74)

Harriet Martineau was stressing the value of nonreactive data or “unobtrusive measures” (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 1966). Although the value of unobtrusive measures is

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still recognized today, her idea of "reflection" is challenged. Some texts may, in fact, "reflect" conditions, but others (e.g., television and movies) are thought to "mediate" experience, that is, to reflect those who produced it, such as culture industries.

Historical Roots

Harriet Martineau's enthusiastic endorsement of the examination of documents for sociological research has echoes in the work of teacher, journalist, lecturer, researcher, and activist Ida B. Wells (1862–1929),¹ a daughter of freed slaves. In 1891, Ida Wells investigated the circumstances surrounding the lynching of blacks in the South, questioning the ubiquitous assumption that black men were lynched for raping white women. Was that, in fact, the crime of which the lynched person was accused? To conduct her study, Wells culled newspaper reports for accounts of lynchings, went to the scenes of the crimes, and interviewed eyewitnesses. Women's studies scholar Paula Giddings (1984) described Ida B. Wells's work as follows:

All in all, she researched the circumstances of 728 lynchings that had taken place during the last decade. . . . Only a third of the murdered Blacks were even accused of rape, much less guilty of it. . . . Most were killed for crimes like "incendiarism," "race prejudice," "quarreling with whites," and "making threats." Furthermore, not only men but women and even children were lynched. . . . In the course of her investigations, Wells uncovered a significant number of interracial liaisons. She dared to print not only that such relationships existed, but that in many cases white women had actually taken the initiative. Black men were being killed for being "weak enough," in Wells's words, to "accept" white women's favors. (pp. 28–31)

Ida Wells concluded that black men were lynched because of whites' racial hatred and sense of threat, rather than for a particular wrongdoing. On June 5, 1892, she published the landmark results of her study in newspaper article form. In response, a large group of New York black women held an unprecedented, successful fund-raiser to support the publication of her

findings as a pamphlet, seeing in her research a defense of their own moral integrity as well as that of black men. This reaction forged a path for the next stage of black women's political development and their involvement (Giddings, 1984; Thompson, 1990). Ida Wells stressed that her research relied on the collection and analysis of documents written by whites. She knew that only such data would make her findings credible in white society. As she predicted, her methods forced whites to confront ugly truths and challenged them to alter their stereotypes, a process most heartily resisted.

Contemporary Feminist Content Analysis

Contemporary feminist scholars of cultural texts see "meaning" as mediated and, therefore, examine both the text and the processes of its production. In other words, interpretative practices involve analyzing not only the content but also the assumptions of the producers and readers. Of course, interpretations of these materials, such as this very chapter, are cultural artifacts, too. In considering the wide array of cultural materials, four types predominate as objects of feminist study. They are *written records* (e.g., diaries,² scientific journals, town names,³ science fiction,⁴ and graffiti); *narratives and visual texts* (e.g., movies,⁵ television shows,⁶ advertisements, greeting cards, and the Internet⁷); *material culture* (e.g., music,⁸ technology,⁹ contents of children's rooms,¹⁰ and ownership of books¹¹); and *behavioral residues* (e.g., patterns of wear in pavement).

Feminist researchers also examine the processes that prevent texts from being produced. Similarly, there has been a strong impetus to identify information missing about particular women and about women in general. Interest in pointing out what is missing is different from mainstream scholarship's practice of delineating "lacunae" to stake out a research turf that can be "filled in." Rather, in the identification of exclusions, erasures (Karon, 1992), and missing information (Reinharz, 1988) of interest, feminist researchers seek to understand the ways certain topics came to be missing and the implications of these gaps. Thus, feminist content analysis is a study both of texts that exist and of texts that do not.

Typically, studying cultural products through the lens of feminist theory involves examining gender at the intersection of such interlocking social forces as sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, religion, ability, and so forth. To a large extent, these studies yield findings that expose a pervasive patriarchal and even misogynist culture (Negrey, 1988, p. 21). Sometimes these cultural themes are found even when feminist literature is the object, as was the case in Nancy Chodorow and Susan Contratto's study of feminist treatments of the topic of mothering (Chodorow & Contratto, 1982; Contratto, 1984).¹² Similarly, Judith Dilorio's (1980) content analysis of scholarly articles about gender role research concluded that the methods used serve to reify social facts and are a conservative force. On the other hand, some cultural artifacts *oppose* the dominant culture. Popular culture created or chosen by women may express resistance to male domination. Feminist scholars are likely to interpret these in terms of counterhegemonic narratives or resilience of "women's culture" without, however, making the claim that there is a single women's culture.

Given the wide breadth of feminist content analyses, this chapter illustrates ways in which feminists have applied a form of this method to study the gendered and sexualized discourses inherent in cultural content, including the conditions of production and systems of interpretation. These new understandings challenge and destabilize the notion that our actions are simply "human nature" because "boys will be boys" and "girls will be girls." In the language of sociologist Michael Kimmel (1994), "from the materials we find around us in our culture—other people, ideas, objects—we actively create our worlds, our identities" (p. 120).

THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

How is the meaning of femaleness created and sustained in society? And how is this set of options pervasive even when gender is not the explicit topic? To a large extent, feminist research recognizes the gendered and sexualized politics of representation as a prevailing locus of female and gender subordination and liberation. In the watershed article "Is Female to

Male as Nature Is to Culture?" anthropologist Sherry Ortner (1974) aptly reveals the complexities and deeply engrained nature of female subordination:

The universality of female subordination, the fact that it exists within every type of social and economic arrangement and in societies of every degree of complexity, indicates to me that we are up against something very profound, very stubborn, something we cannot rout out simply by rearranging a few tasks and roles in the social system, or even by reordering the whole economic structure. (p. 68)

Ortner (1974) suggests that the concept of female subordination can be divided into three theoretical frameworks: (1) ideologies and statements that *explicitly* devalue women, attributing them, their roles, their work, their products, and their social circles less prestige than those attributed to men; (2) symbolic mechanisms that *implicitly* indicate female inferiority; and (3) social and structural arrangements that *exclude* women from participation or powerful roles (p. 69). Symbolic mechanisms embodied in texts and imagery of gendered and sexualized representations subtly and insidiously inform social arrangements and systems of power. They are ubiquitous and inescapable.

Uncovering Gendered Messages: From Women's Magazines to Teen Magazines: A Case Study

Contemporary cultural representations transmit messages of patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, ageism, and racism. They transmit messages about the able-bodied and the beautiful, as cultural ideals tied to gender as well. A common practice in content analyses is to examine how gender and other interlocking social forces are embedded in mainstream texts and imagery. Betty Friedan's early study of women's magazine fiction was devoted to this purpose. In Chapter 2, "The Happy Housewife Heroine," of her classic *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan (1963) explains the childish themes that dominate women's magazine fiction, and then plaintively expresses her guilt:

I helped create the American woman's image. There is the harm it is women try to live them deny the women grow up the reality of the

The idealized heroine" portray other important 1950s because the socializing and woman—for men

Feminist school feature stories, a women's magazine socialization into McRobbie (2000) weekly British that the magazine less sameness, assumes a coming or girlhood" (p. magazines embody "consensual total by which "all girls a boy, lose weight cook" (p. 70). By age and/or other magazines obfuscate such as race, class underscoring points these studies are readers, and thus respond to these only surmise.

In her content *Teen and Seventeen* found that the male were portrayed as & Halteman, 1999 ditionally female extension of Pier (1998) at the University examined selected zine from 1945 to content of the

I helped create this image. I have watched American women for fifteen years try to conform to it. But I can no longer deny my own knowledge of its terrible implications. It is not a harmless image. There may be no psychological terms for the harm it is doing. But what happens when women try to live according to an image that makes them deny their minds? What happens when women grow up in an image that makes them deny the reality of the changing world? (p. 38)¹³

The idealized image of the “happy housewife heroine” portrayed in these magazines negates other important aspects of the women of the 1950s because they detract from the project of socializing and promoting the domestic woman—for men and for the state.

Feminist scholars theorize the majority of feature stories, articles, and advertisements of women’s magazines as instruments of female socialization into subordinate roles. Angela McRobbie (2000), in her semiotic study of the weekly British teen magazine *Jackie*, asserts that the magazine connotes a “class-less, race-less sameness, a kind of false unity which assumes a common experience of womanhood or girlhood” (p. 70). In effect, these types of magazines embody ideological meanings and a “consensual totality of feminine adolescence” by which “all girls want to know is how to catch a boy, lose weight, look their best, and be able to cook” (p. 70). By encapsulating individuals into age and/or other interest categories, mainstream magazines obfuscate interlocking social forces such as race, class, and sexuality for the sake of underscoring points of commonality. Although these studies are powerful, they do not study the readers, and thus, we do not know how girls respond to these messages—a response we can only surmise.

In her content analysis of fiction articles in *Teen* and *Seventeen* magazines, Kate Pierce found that the majority of the female characters were portrayed as dependent (Schlenker, Caron, & Halteman, 1998). Working females filled traditionally female-specific occupations. In an extension of Pierce’s analysis, Schlenker et al. (1998) at the University of Maine systematically examined selected editions of *Seventeen* magazine from 1945 through to 1995 to see if the content of the editorial pages reflected the

changing agendas and goals of the feminist movement. They found that during 3 years (1945, 1975, and 1995) that they define as key years for feminist activism, there were higher percentages of feminist content in the editorials. Nevertheless, at least half of these magazine issues were still dedicated to traditional content (Schlenker et al., 1998).

On the other hand, some feminist scholars contend that mainstream teen magazines offer a social construct of pleasure and resistance anchored in a female-centric space. Some perceive these social texts as female-focused enjoyment: the “simple act of taking pleasure through a female-centered venue itself resists patriarchal prescriptions of a self-abnegating and passive femininity” (Currie, 1999, p. 9). The female gaze, so to speak, may be honored in these magazines. Laura Carpenter (1998) examined sexual scripts in *Seventeen* from 1974 to 1994 and found “new scripts” of female desire, homosexuality, oral sex, masturbation, and female sexual ambivalence. The incorporation of progressive or nonnormative discourses of sexuality may encourage young women to choose safer sexual practices, resist gender and sexual subordination, and validate their own understandings and experiences of sexuality. At the same time, Carpenter found these benefits to be limited. Editors, she found, legitimize dominant sexual scripts over alternative scripts such as homosexuality, fellatio, or recreational orientations of sexuality. Overwhelming countervailing capitalist sexist messages found in the advertisements also diminish the power of these scripts.

Most of this research, based solely on the content in women’s and teen magazines, presumes that the text has a uniform impact on its readership. Suzanna Danuta Walters (1995) looks at the multiple faces and expressions of the performer Madonna to illustrate the complexity of content in popular culture:

The figure of Madonna is emblematic of the confused way women are represented in popular culture. We must reckon with the complicated and contradictory nature of images in our culture. It is too simplistic to state that there are “bad” images that produce “bad” attitudes and behaviors; unfortunately, the situation is more complex than that. Different audiences may interpret the same

images in different ways. One group's "negative" image may be another's source of empowerment. (pp. 2–3)

Walters underscores an important distinction. Gender and sexuality imagery is not necessarily understood by researchers and readers in the same way. Feminist scholars have contributed significantly to cultural analyses by examining the position of women in imagery and narratives. These scholars have illuminated how patriarchy informs the structure of content and the gaze. They have illustrated the constructed nature of imagery and texts. Yet Walters (1995) identifies three problems with most of this research—an absence of "real" women, social relations, and politics and history (pp. 145–147). To get beyond this methodological impasse, Walters suggests research with an intersubjective emphasis that flows from the researcher's analysis of the text and also includes interpretations from real women.¹⁴

Dorothy E. Smith (1990) develops a framework for analyzing the social relations embodied in and mediated by texts in which women are both the subjects and the readers. She insists that women are not simply passive receptacles of socialization processes; they are active constructors of their identities. Yet the market and advertising for clothing, makeup, shoes, accessories, and so on through print and film play a significant role in their self-creation and the choices available to them for work and leisure. Thus, Smith (1990) asserts, "The relations organizing this dialectic between the active and creative subject and the market and productive organization of capital are those of a textually mediated discourse" (p. 161). In other words, the meanings attached to femininity are interpretative practices mediated by social texts and the commercial and patriarchal objectives embedded within them. Accordingly, the discourse extends beyond the text. It involves "the talk" women do in association with social texts, and "the work" of creating oneself to actualize the textual imagery, the skills and actual effort involved in shopping, wearing makeup, and putting oneself together in a way that will gain approval from other women and appeal to men (Smith, 1990, p. 163).

In her study of teen magazines, sociologist Dawn Currie (1997) replaces herself as the interpreter with 48 girls, "real" and "active"

readers of the text aged 13 to 17 years. By bringing the real readers into the fore, Currie (1999) forges an empirical path for examining social subjectivity, the ways in which texts are mediated, interpreted, internalized, contested, and rearticulated through "the struggles of competing accounts of the 'social'" (p. 247). In contrast to traditional approaches to content analyses, Currie implements a grounded intersubjective analysis that focuses on what girls, the real readers of teen magazines, have to say about the role of cultural imagery and narratives in their lived experience of becoming a woman. Her team of researchers conducted focus groups and interviews with female teens regarding magazine reading preferences and habits, interpretations of advertising images, and topics of interest, as well as more general teenage topics. Strangely, her research is similar to the market research that drives the publication policies of these for-profit publications.

For many of the female teenage informants in Currie's study, magazines were one of the few social spaces where they were acknowledged as both teenagers and women. Currie (1999) notes that the magazines did not simply "fill a discursive void" (p. 247). Rather, the girls were discerning in their likes and dislikes of teen-zines, expressing predilections for articles that explored the realities of teenage life. Despite this, many of the informants were aware of the ideological messages imbued in these magazines that girls are expected to "always look good and that guys' opinions and preferences are important" (p. 247). While the magazines "reassure girls that their experiences fall within the boundaries of 'normal' teenage life," many of these girls mentioned that "it is difficult 'to be a girl,' especially to pursue the cultural mandate to 'look good'" (p. 19).

By connecting the dots from these social texts of fashion, beauty, and consumption to the industries advertising in these magazines to the large publishing industries themselves, Currie (1999) renders transparent the economic motives and patriarchal values lurking behind the glossy imagery of airbrushed women and their accompanying messages of beauty and consumption. In other words, idealized notions of beauty and advice around sexual practice produce strong profit for the fashion and beauty industry. Magazines are money, whether they

are teenmags (making advertising magazine folds).

Currie's intertextual materials characterize breaks down the relationship between structure and "gender scripts" mediated discourses. gendered ideologies do not do breaks the social knowledge dimension, including the interpretations of how we actively and how we are conditions of production making.

Looking to the Overt and Not

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Currie's intersubjective approach to cultural materials charts an empirical course that breaks down the sociological dichotomy between structure and agency. Currie redefines "gender scripts" magazines as "textually mediated discourses," thereby illustrating how the gendered ideologies infused in magazine content do not destroy agency. This method breaks the social silence by unveiling unacknowledged dimensions of the magazine content, including the commercial context and the interpretations of readers. Her work exposes how we actively create ourselves as women, and how we are influenced by the commercial conditions of production that are not of our making.

Looking to the General Mediascape: Overt and Not So Overt Stereotypes

Whereas the cultural analyses discussed above focus on media tailored for women, this next section looks at the broader media landscape where feminist scholars examine stereotypes of gender, race, and sexuality in newspaper articles, photo-journalism, and advertisements (Fox, 1990). These analyses reveal gender relations not only between men and women but also among women of differing social locations. By challenging assumptions about gender, feminist researchers expose the political nature of mainstream content, prying open embedded social mythologies that many are committed to concealing (Fine, 1992, p. 221).

Sociologists Linda Blum and Nena Stracuzzi's (2004) content analysis of "Gender in the Prozac Nation" reveals a subtle presentation of gendered norms. Looking at 83 major newspaper articles on Prozac between 1987 and 2000, Blum and Stracuzzi developed coding categories based on theoretical concerns and multiple close readings. They identified explicit and subtle gendered cues of depressed people, including the traits attributed to Prozac users, their occupations, bodily concerns, and everyday obsessions (p. 274). Their analysis indicates that the overarching presentation of Prozac was fairly gender neutral. Yet the articles were

replete with covert gendered messages of the elite productive female body:

Our in-depth analysis suggests that this worthy user, with an enhanced and productive body, is gendered female. . . . New Scientist was most direct, observing that it "seems to be a drug of our times" that "helps produce ambitious, extrovert go getters," particularly among the women who are "most" likely to use it: "it may help take them to the success that society expects of them." (p. 279)

As such, the degendered guise of popular Prozac talk was often contradicted by gendered vignettes and imagery endowed with messages about disciplining, improving, and strengthening the female body. In addition, there was a "pronounced absence of race" in the articles that seemed to privilege "whiteness," as the unmarked or assumed position of "feminine fitness or new body ideals" (Blum & Stracuzzi, 2004, p. 283). This multilayered approach culled out explicit and implicit expressions of gender, moving us from a superficial gender-neutral read of these articles to an important feminist critique of the subtle ways in which popular media generalize, mythologize, and commodify particular brands of women by decontextualizing them from the fabric of their everyday lives.

Feminist content analyses are also useful in investigating the role of gendered and sexualized texts and imagery in public policy. Sociologist Karen Booth (2000) analyzed 108 "Baby AIDS" news stories published in New York newspapers. Her goal was to question if racist, heterosexist, and sexist assumptions informed HIV surveillance during the 1993 Baby AIDS debates in New York. At the time, HIV infection and cases of AIDS among women of childbearing age were expected to triple in New York. Despite this danger, many women were not finding out that they were at risk for the disease because mandatory HIV newborn tests were confidential and doctors were barred from disclosing their patients' HIV status to the sexual partners.

Booth's (2000) analysis of the stories reveals a blaming discourse toward women of color. For example, in 1993, the *New York Times* ran a front-page report, "Testing Newborns for AIDS Virus Raises Issues of Mothers' Privacy," on the emerging Baby AIDS issue. The story begins

by asserting without explanation that “most infected women who give birth each year are black or Hispanic.” Booth notes that in this story, women of color are defined as a category that is more likely to infect children, thus legitimating the question of whether their privacy should be invaded by mandatory newborn testing. White women, it seems, would not be affected by this testing policy (Booth, 2000, pp. 653–654). Booth also identifies an “anti-gay hostility” in many of the newspaper stories (p. 651). Her findings suggest a binary representation of who is and who is not affected by HIV and AIDS. As such, the general public of invisibly privileged people—by implication, white female heterosexual nondrug injectors—receive a “false and extremely dangerous illusion of safety,” while drug users, women of color, sex workers, and homosexual men are discursively dislodged from the general public to the marginalized periphery of “groups at risk” (p. 658).

In her content analysis of news stories and images in Israeli popular media between 1994 and 1997, Dafna Lemish (2000) shows that the press depicts female immigrants from the former Soviet Union as hypersexualized, marginalized, and estranged. Lemish asks, “What cultural forces perpetuate these images and grant them discriminatory meaning?” Her descriptive categories included the type of newspaper and the article’s salience; main themes discussed with regard to women immigrants and stance provided; and main themes intimated in the headline, in the sub-headline, or more subtly conveyed. Three major images or typologies emerged from the analysis: (1) “the whore,” supplier of sexual services; (2) “the other,” an explicit questioning of the “women’s Jewishness . . . deviation from expected norms of a functioning wife and mother . . . or relating the immigrants to crime and poverty—at the social periphery of normative society”; and (3) “the exceptional immigrant”—a few articles were success stories about women immigrants “who against all odds, overcame obstacles and made it in Israeli society” (pp. 339–343).

According to Lemish, limited contextualization of these stories blurs reality and conflates portrayals of immigration, prostitution, and marginalization. These stereotypical misrepresentations and representations of female

immigration speak volumes about the cultural mechanisms at play. Lemish notes that minimizing individual characteristics and emphasizing appearance and sexuality expels these women from the mainstream of Israeli society:

Polarized binary forms of representation, such as deviant whores and unfit mothers versus the expected definition of Jewish femininity and motherhood, are used to signify otherness. Such a symbolic marking of difference serves to maintain the symbolic boundaries by which the absorbing culture defines its identity. (p. 345)

Such a polarized view presents a challenging situation for both women in Israel who are *not* immigrants from the former USSR and female immigrants who come from the former USSR. Lemish exposes the media’s deployment of divisive measures to reinforce relational systems not only between men and women but also among women of differing social locations.

In more recent content analyses, feminists are operationalizing the category of “woman” in new ways. Instead of lumping all women together, researchers systematically differentiate representations of women. Attention to multiple social forces allows feminists to frame their research in ways that highlight gender justice issues between men and women and among women of various races and classes.

Researching Online Pornography: The Male Gaze in Virtual Reality

So far we have discussed the politics of representation in print media. But 21st-century analyses must address the Internet with its wide and fast circulation of text and imagery. The Internet is a major distributor of pornography, and thus it is no surprise that feminist scholarship is focusing on online pornography. Studies have begun by asking, What is different and unique about the online experience of pornography? In a study comparing the extent of sexual violence in magazines, videos, and an Internet user group, Martin Barron and Michael Kimmel (2000) found the content of pornography to be more violent on the Internet. They attribute the increased violence in online pornography to the growing “democratization of pornographic media” (p. 165) and

decreases in production content on new tech

Despite the myths that differentiate blatant imagery, there is what constitutes violent actions. Addressing Gossett and Sarah’s online content analysis inequities and power with regard to race and construction of violence (p. 705). To identify Gossett and Byrne’s Internet search engine (Excite) to search terminology such as *rape, torture, bondage, rapist* forth (p. 694). The female rape victims of this type were linked to sites for and Byrne coded their structural elements, navigational terms of the narrative including the presence total number of real imagery, including perpetrators, kinds of bondage, types of perpetrators and victims (a full analysis of content that the Web sites contain narratives of female to race and age and (p. 701). They found Asian women on the pornography and attitudes being more explicit, they identified the term *torture*, a term Asian women in other (Bell, 1987; Gossett and Byrne draw on Patricia Hill Collins’ contextualized contemporary of icons or representation viewer’s attention or the portrayed individualities ascribed to them

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Pornography: Virtual Reality

ssed the politics of repre-
But 21st-century analy-
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vist scholarship is focus-
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ent and unique about the
ornography? In a study
sexual violence in maga-
ternet user group, Martin
immel (2000) found the
to be more violent on the
the increased violence in
te growing "democratiza-
media" (p. 165) and

decreases in production costs and control of
content on new technologies.

Despite the myriad studies of pornography
that differentiate between violent and nonvio-
lent imagery, there has been little discussion of
what constitutes violent pornographic represen-
tations. Addressing this problem, Jennifer
Gossett and Sarah Byrne (2002) conduct an
online content analysis to determine how "social
inequities and power differentials—particularly
with regard to race and age—play into the con-
struction of violent pornographic images"
(p. 705). To identify rape sites on the Internet,
Gossett and Byrne employed a variety of
Internet search engines (Yahoo! Altavista, and
Excite) to search terms evoking violent pornog-
raphy such as *rape, gang rape, forced sex, tor-
ture, bondage, rapist, forced fuck, bitch*, and so
forth (p. 694). They sought Web sites with
female rape victims. Thirty-one free Web sites
of this type were linked predominantly to adver-
tisement sites for pay-per-view sites. Gossett
and Byrne coded the sites as a whole in terms of
their structural elements (e.g., graphic techni-
ques, navigational headings) as well as in
terms of the narrative and visual elements,
including the presence of violent words, the
total number of real images, and descriptions of
imagery, including the number of victims and
perpetrators, kinds of weapons, scenes of
bondage, types of locations, and race of perpe-
trators and victims (p. 696). Through this care-
ful analysis of content and structure, they found
that the Web sites comprise graphic imagery and
narratives of female victims with more attention
to race and age and less to individual attributes
(p. 701). They found an overrepresentation of
Asian women on the Web sites vending rape
pornography and attribute this in part to their
faces being more easily recognizable. In addi-
tion, they identified the sites through the search
term *torture*, a term associated with imagery of
Asian women in other forms of pornography
(Bell, 1987; Gossett & Byrne, 2002). Gossett
and Byrne draw on the concepts of sociologist
Patricia Hill Collins (1991), who has reconcep-
tualized contemporary pornography as a "series
of icons or representations that focus the
viewer's attention on the relationship between
the portrayed individual and the general quali-
ties ascribed to that class of individuals"

(p. 168). Pornographic images are iconographic
because they reflect the realities of the social
context from which they surface. Her complex
view contrasts with the views of some feminists,
who use a broad-brush definition of pornogra-
phy as a way that "men oppress women"
(p. 180). While many feminists contend that
pornography affects all women, deploying the
sweeping categories of men and women without
reference to race or ethnicity tends to underesti-
mate the way that race marks and shapes
pornography (Gossett & Byrne, 2002, p. 703).

This reconceptualization of pornography
poses the question, how does the social context
of the Internet shape the way female victims are
represented on "rape" Web sites? Gossett and
Byrne (2002) suggest that the *global* reach of
the Internet might be shaping the pornography
market through different social dimensions than
what we might observe if the pornography was
targeted solely to an American audience of con-
sumers (p. 701). They contend that a racialized
discourse underlies the representation of rape on
the Internet.

These sites also depict violent pornography
as a sexualized representation of the uneven
power relations between men and women.
Drawing from Mulvey's conception of the male
gaze, Gossett and Byrne (2002) reveal its perva-
siveness on these sites:

In Internet rape, the gaze of the man is the privi-
leged point of view. This is implied by the relative
absence of perpetrator images or descriptions of the
perpetrator and is made explicit in the site he adver-
tises, "Through the Eyes of the Rapist." The viewer
of these sites is given not only the power of the gaze
but also the power to choose which representations
of inequality he or she prefers to see. This exem-
plified by the presence of jukeboxes describing
categories of women who can be selected for vic-
timization. . . . The perpetrators are given great
power over the women by tying them up, strangling
them, or not being shown at all. (p. 704)

The interactive capabilities of the Internet intro-
duce new dimensions of power over women and
manipulative choices for the pornographic
seeker. By clicking an icon or navigational head-
ing, these viewers virtually acquire the power to
see "through the eyes of a rapist." The Internet

allows the viewer to select a story, adjust the size of the image, decide to move to a more violent image, or toggle between a few stories.

Given the accessibility, interactivity, and male dominance of these sites, the Gossett and Byrne (2002) study propels us to expand feminist stances toward pornography from simple censorship to global concerns of dissemination and interpretation. Their analysis of violent pornographic content on the Internet underscores its complexity, its integration of gender and race, and the ability of rape Web site users to experience the virtual power of violence against women. How this translates to real life remains a difficult question. Gossett and Byrne (2002) hope that the emergence of new technologies such as the Internet will spur debate about the availability, content, and implications of pornography for the purpose of stopping "sexual violence against women and understand(ing) ways racism and sexism are expressed and reinforced through cultural representations, such as pornography" (p. 706).

While content analyses of the male dominant and misogynistic dimensions of the Internet such as the rape Web sites could have resulted in a feminist avoidance of the Internet, this has not been the case. On the contrary, feminist scholarship is tackling the complexity and contradictory character of the Internet. Some feminist research demonstrates how the Internet functions as a male-dominated space that continues to subordinate women (Herring, Johnson, & DiBenedetto, 1995; Kendall, 1996, 2000; Kramarae, 1995). In the article "This Discussion Is Going Too Far! Male Resistance to Female Participation on the Internet," Herring et al. (1995) reveal how males participating in mixed-sex online discussion groups employ numerous strategies to silence women, including "threats to the group and cries of 'this is too much'" when female participation exceeds 30% (p. 92). It is no surprise that to a large extent, women feel safer and more comfortable on women-centered and women-only sites in which they establish the terms of discourse. The progressive and democratizing potential of the Internet as a new and safe medium for women to network, strategize, and share knowledge has been recognized in some feminist studies, as long as the sites constitute a separate space (Cherny & Weise, 1996; Pearce, 1999; Sinclair, 1996; Spender, 1995b).

STRETCHING THE BOUNDARIES OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Because women are claiming new terrain, cultivating networks, and producing and exchanging knowledge, we believe there is cautious optimism about the Internet among feminists. Gillian Youngs (2004), for one, enthusiastically describes this new feminist frontier as a site that enables women to interact and strategize across geographic borders:

Access to the Internet has heralded a new stage of feminism with regard to the international reach of women and the NGOs that represent their interests. Virtual technologies are facilitating women's collective endeavors in diverse ways, including consciousness-raising, intervention in policy processes, and project-driven innovations. . . . Those I have learned from have enhanced and made more complex my initial feminist sense that part of the problem with the "information society" is that what counts as knowledge is too readily assumed; and furthermore, that the international reach of the internet could be much more actively used to share and discover new and established knowledge, including knowledge about technology and its potential applications. (p. 203)

Youngs characterizes the feminist frontier in cyberspace as a base to produce new forms of "knowledge."

Feminists point to women's historical absence from public enterprises of knowledge production. To a large extent, this absence has meant exclusion from power. In the article "The Man of Reason," Genevieve Lloyd (1989) challenges the "natural order" of knowledge production by proposing an inclusive framework that expands membership to women. Lloyd asserts that the thin facade of impartiality in "objective," "neutral" knowledge masks the inherent bias and privilege of male knowledge producers and the social location from which they generate knowledge. Women sometimes adopt the male stance, so some men of reason may, in fact, be women. This reinvention of who can be a knower, in turn, leads to the question, what constitutes reason? While one could simply accommodate other knowers into an already existing

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rubric, Lloyd chooses to expand our notion of knowledge. She advocates documenting, analyzing, and including the "contingencies and vicissitudes of interactions with individuals" as a means to identify knowledge beyond delimiting "what is common to all" (p. 119).

For feminist historians, personal documents have been a key source for understanding the knowledge produced by women of the past. Historically ignored women are made visible when relevant artifacts are located and studied (Brown, 1986). At the same time, analysis of this type of material illuminates the forces that shape the lives of the vast majority, in contrast to the elite minority (Bushman, 1981; Springer & Springer, 1986). Historians looking through a feminist lens at the materials women have produced often challenge conventional knowledge. Just as feminist historians have rescued shards of evidence from the lives of *anonymous* women, they have also resuscitated the record of *literate* or *powerful* women.¹⁵ It is important to remember that some women were not powerless or voiceless even if their power was exerted on the interpersonal rather than the international stage. Some women did have access to education, some were inspired, and some were able to produce important work; key examples in sociology are Harriet Martineau, Jane Addams, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman in the early history of sociology. Some have reputations that have little to do with their major accomplishments; key examples are Florence Nightingale and many female scientists. Examining both the anonymous majority and the later ignored minority is an important methodological perspective in feminist historical research. This interwoven interpretation understands women whose voices were heard in the context of women whose voices were muted or silenced. The "extraordinary" woman and the "ordinary" woman may not be as different from one another as they seem at first glance; to fully understand each, we need to understand both.

Emerging Cyberfeminisms: A Case Study of Virtual Feminist Communities

Feminist historians use personal documents to examine the lives of women in the past, just as contemporary feminists use the Internet to

link with women in other communities and cultures. The virtual public space of the Internet has opened up important possibilities for feminists to claim public spaces online and to disseminate knowledge that might otherwise go unseen. In the words of Dale Spender (1995a), "Women have to take part in making and shaping that cyber-society, or else they risk becoming outsiders." Sociologist Ann Travers (2003) reminds us that cyberspace is not unique. She argues that all public spaces are socially constructed. Nevertheless, the Internet offers feminists "unique opportunities for establishing visible feminist publics, for creating feminist spaces without 'going away' from the 'general' public space" (p. 231). Travers's words connote an interesting connection between current feminist virtual publics and feminist consciousness-raising groups of the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States. While educated white women were likely to populate the consciousness-raising groups, feminist virtual communities seem more diverse in participation and broader in function (Weiler, 1991).

Some analyses of virtual feminist communities suggest that the Internet moves beyond the constraints of face-to-face communication. It creates unique spaces for community development and dialogue across difference. Sibylle Gruber (2001) explains:

Various women's activists groups have started to "recast" their positions online. In doing so, they do not intend to create a virtual image remote from real causes; instead, they desire to increase their visibility and broaden their appeal to those who would otherwise be restricted to localized borders, barbed wire, and religious or political persecution, while at the same time keeping their local concerns in mind. (p. 79)

Gruber analyzes the discourse strategies on three feminist Web sites: Bat Shalom in Jerusalem—a feminist peace organization of Israeli women, NEWW—Network of East-West Women, and UNIFEM—United Nations Development Fund for Women. She titles her conclusion "Silent No More" and discusses the combination of alternative and traditional rhetorical devices these sites employ. The interface of alternative rhetorics of peace, cooperation, equity, and empowerment

with traditional assertive, authoritative, male-oriented vocabularies encourages women to engage in local issues as well as in larger goals such as women's equal representation in global economic and political endeavors. The online participation of these three organizations extends their offline partnerships. The rhetorical strategies of active involvement, participatory change, and networking cultivate a strong sense of community to work toward creating a world that resists violence, oppression, and hatred (Gruber, 2001, pp. 88–89).

Building an online feminist community involves the development of a collective identity. Joyce Nip (2004) analyzes the identity building capacity of the Internet in social movements by focusing on the Queer Sisters, the women's group in Hong Kong, and the online bulletin they produce. Nip uses a multidimensional design, including content analysis, online surveys, interview, and observation on the Queer Sisters Web site. Nip indicates that the Queer Sisters face a number of challenges in cultivating a collective identity. Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier (1992) define "collective identity" as individuals who share a sense of solidarity, internalize a collective consciousness (political interpretative frameworks, relational networks, and goals), and create a culture of direct opposition to the dominant order. The Internet adds a wrinkle to this definition as online collective identity processes are not face-to-face interactions for interpreting grievances and debating political opportunities. Rather, they are interactions mediated by the conventions of the Internet (Nip, 2004, p. 27).

As the Queer Sisters draw from queer theory grounded in postmodernism and poststructuralism, the possibility of a collective consciousness is further complicated. As such, participants on the Queer Sisters Web site confront the "contradictory task of consolidating a sense of identity among supporters" while advocating the deconstruction of a stable identity (Nip, 2004, p. 28). In addition, the Queer Sisters home page privileges inclusivity over political perspectives:

Although the home page of the Queer Sisters did introduce the group's aims and goals, visitors with a lesbian inclination would still find themselves accommodated within the fluid sexual values advocated by the group. Neither the Queer Sisters

home page nor the bulletin board suggested any expectation for board participants to be politically aware of their social conditions. Thus, the Queer Sisters were faced with an aggregate of people whose values and aspirations differ substantially. This made the project of collective identity building much more difficult. (p. 44)

In considering identity building on the Queer Sisters bulletin, Nip finds that the participants develop a sense of solidarity and share a sense of opposition toward the dominant order while they do not identify or internalize a sense of collective consciousness. Her findings reflect an important distinction between strategy- and identity-oriented social movements. The participants on the Queer Sisters' bulletin board convey less interest in building consciousness and more focus on creating a space for dialogue. Instead of using the bulletin board to build a collective queer identity, the board provides the Queer Sisters with a site to express and exchange their differing views and experiences, thus destabilizing a monolithic or stable notion of identity.

Other studies of feminist communities and content on the Internet punctuate the tremendous possibilities and challenges of cyberfeminism. Yisook Choi, Linda Steiner, and Sooh Kim (2005) analyze two feminist cyberspaces, Dalara Talsepo (Moon World and Cells of Daughters) and Unninet (Sisters' Village and Network) to examine the ways in which Korean feminists are and are not successfully carving out spaces for feminism in cyberspace. Their multidimensional research design brings into relief the social architecture and content of online feminist media. In effect, Choi and her colleagues interweave these two dimensions to examine the continuities and discontinuities of cyberfeminism:

As the two zines' demonstrate, the advantage of the Internet in bringing together people who share neither temporal nor spatial co-presence also means that their bonds may be attenuated to the point of fracture. Time, energy: these are crucially limited resources, even for online feminists. Money remains an even more intractable issue. . . . The flexibility and easy access of the Internet predict that many sites will inevitably come and go.

But the ocean of ever-Internet suggests that another and together to ive activist community lived nature of webzine is, sustaining and e media is itself important impact of the feminist

By interfacing the organizational issues of content, Choi and her costrate the need for susta support feminist knowl both these feminist W commonality in the desir form to talk freely and c tive definitions of woma of the Internet and onq resources in the form energy have significantly sustain their organizatio the dimensions of socia ular, organizational st important layer to the di nist communities.

Virtual Possibilities &

What distinguishes frduction on the Internet frduction? Sherry Turkle (MIT Program of Scie Society, identifies the I experimentation and risk Robert Jay Lifton's book cates that there is room c tities. Akin to "Proteus, o online identities can be and anchored in coheren (Turkle, 1995, p. 261). T can have a sense of self v one self. By experimenti ties, self-awareness of "c also expose our limitation

When identity was defir was relatively easy to re ation from a norm. A allows a greater capa diversity. It makes it eas

But the ocean of ever-proliferating voices on the Internet suggests that if feminists are to find one another and together to form a mutually supportive activist community on and offline, this short-lived nature of webzines will be problematic. That is, sustaining and expanding online feminist media is itself important to the social and political impact of the feminist movement. (p. 24)

By interfacing the ways in which daily organizational issues affected the production of content, Choi and her colleagues clearly demonstrate the need for sustainable infrastructures to support feminist knowledge production. While both these feminist Web communities shared commonality in the desire to cultivate a safe platform to talk freely and experiment with alternative definitions of womanhood, the ephemerality of the Internet and ongoing issues of limited resources in the form of revenue, time, and energy have significantly affected their ability to sustain their organizations. Taking into account the dimensions of social production—in particular, organizational sustainability—adds an important layer to the discussion of online feminist communities.

Virtual Possibilities and Shortcomings

What distinguishes feminist knowledge production on the Internet from other modes of production? Sherry Turkle (1995), professor in the MIT Program of Science, Technology, and Society, identifies the Internet as a space for experimentation and risk. Turkle, drawing from Robert Jay Lifton's book *The Protean Self*, indicates that there is room online for multiple identities. Akin to "Proteus, of fluid transformations," online identities can be multiple, yet integrated and anchored in coherence and a moral outlook (Turkle, 1995, p. 261). Turkle suggests that one can have a sense of self without being limited to one self. By experimenting with multiple identities, self-awareness of "our inner diversity" can also expose our limitations:

When identity was defined as unitary and solid it was relatively easy to recognize and censure deviation from a norm. A more fluid sense of self allows a greater capacity for acknowledging diversity. It makes it easier to accept the array of

our (and others') inconsistent personae—perhaps with humor, perhaps with irony. We do not feel compelled to rank or judge the elements of our multiplicity. We do not feel compelled to exclude what does not fit in. (p. 262)

While the threshold for trying on new identities and ways of being is low on the Internet, facilitating endless possibilities for bending gender, age, race, sexuality, or religion, this fluid sense of self does not live in a vacuum; it emerges from how one connects and communicates in a constructed virtual space (p. 258).

Experiences on the Internet involve cycling and toggling back and forth between virtual windows. Producing and drawing knowledge from these windows is partial and ever changing as people and Web communities continuously modify and add new content to their sites. The historian and theorist Donna Haraway (1991) asserts that people cannot fully see themselves because their perspectives are mediated by technology. The expectation that all aspects of self, community, state, nation, and planet will seamlessly fit together silences those who do not possess the "right" piece. In the language of Haraway (1991), "The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly; and therefore able to join with another, to see together without claiming another."

Feminist online communities embody this notion of partial situated knowledge as they manufacture spaces where different perspectives are presented but not subsumed with a totalizing notion of knowledge. Life on these virtual communities can expand the ways in which knowledge is produced and interpreted. Nevertheless, these feminist communities are not immune to systems of power and informal hierarchies because access to the Internet and resources vary significantly and subtly among participating men and women.

In contrast to other groups using the Internet for political mobilizing, women develop safe, personalized spaces for communication, strategic planning, and networking. For many women, the relative anonymity of going online offers the possibilities for new and unexplored forms of expression. Nicole Constable (2003),

anthropologist at the University of Pittsburgh, differentiates Internet conversations, asynchronous communications, from face-to-face, synchronous communications, indicating that Internet conversations involve a lapse in time between posting a statement and receiving a response. Akin to telephone conversations, "Internet conversations lack the facial cues and body language that accompany most face-to-face conversations" (p. 36). As a result of these Internet conventions, Constable contends that people are less inhibited online. Wendy Harcourt (2000) also notes that women find virtual encounters to be easier than face-to-face interactions as the element of appearance is removed. Women virtually communicating on feminist Web sites might be more inclined to reveal their negotiations with identity and gender than they would offline in a social space with their colleagues and families where they perceive a greater risk of vulnerability or alienation. In particular, women speaking about issues of violence against women are more likely to express their experiences, including their emotions. The relatively anonymous nature of the Internet provides a safety net for women to break down barriers between private and public knowledge.

In cyberspace, feminist academics and activists cross paths on online communities from which they look for words to understand one another. Harcourt (2000) notes that online politics differ from those in the classroom or at political protests:

In cyberspace there is no actual classroom, no trade union hall, no ancestral ground to defend, no government office to lobby. These remain virtual points of reference that are imagined not actually embraced or shared. Those who would not meet with professors or high-level policy makers find themselves in correspondence with them through e-mail. Papers that would never have reached an African NGO in rural Senegal are translated and sent in a few days of delivery at a scientific or inter-governmental event. . . . Women engrossed in their own battles for survival suddenly find groups living in other countries [who] share the same concerns and exchange valuable strategic knowledge. (p. 27)

As previously closed lines of connection and conversation begin to open, the Internet lends

itself to overcoming traditional barriers of communication between and within communities. These new lines of communication and increased networking between communities, to some extent, expand the boundaries and possibilities of knowledge production, thus enabling new forms of social action. According to Harcourt (2000), "a more women designed web-weaving could reflect women's sense of community and move us away from the consumer focused alienated individual interaction that characterizes most interaction on the Web today" (p. 29).

Despite these possibilities, there are limitations to this virtual mode of feminist knowledge production. While many feminist cyberspaces extol inclusivity, many people live in places that are not technically set up for online participation. In addition, there are many who are marginalized or without access to the Internet:

the non-English speaking nations, "irrelevant" nations and peoples, national, religious, and ideological minorities, poor in poor countries and poor in rich countries (the majority of whom are women), most old and disabled, and all children (although certainly not Western screenagers). (Harcourt, 2000, p. 29)

The questions emerge: To what extent are these virtual modes generating new insiders and outsiders, and are these boundaries more or less fluid than other forms of communication? Generally speaking, the Internet as a public sphere is not a fixed space. Given the imperfect and changing characteristics of the Internet, feminist counterpublics need to both accept this incompleteness and commit to ongoing critical reflexivity (Travers, 2003, p. 234).

The question of how online dialogue translates into real life is critical for those engaged in cyberfeminist communities. Although the Internet provides an open space for ongoing conversations, Harcourt inquires, "Where do all these cyber dialogues go?" Some feminists who participate online experience virtual overload as they are inundated with never-ending e-mails and information. Most agree that differentiating between what is and what is not relevant on a long list of e-mail messages is time-consuming. But there is disagreement about whether e-mail and discussion boards are impersonal or are

an efficient means carries the risk messages sent in (Harcourt, 2000) could be perceived distract feminists fronting gender in online feminist co-sion to cyberfeminist face events and in. When we look the Web, where ar create and inhabit Internet, these spa-trolled and designed decision-making re-cludes very few p. 28). And for those the telecommunication alternative agenda, a arena is no small fe-telecommunications area as it is often circumscribed for ex-scientists and gover-imited opening for fi-

CONCLUSION

The preceding overview analysis demonstrates the development of new virtual media. Despite media, however, feminism retains a basic approach lying political message the producers attempt to of these aspects. It is important content is not neutral McLuhan and Quentin I *Medium Is the Message*. (subtle) political aspects of text, images, film, magazine, academic journals, and Web vehicle of power.

For this reason there are and Web sites devoted to promoting, and undermining. For example, Probe Mission corporation whose mission primacy of Christian the

an efficient means for communication. E-mail carries the risks of endless conversations, messages sent in haste, and tempers escalating (Harcourt, 2000, p. 28). Although these risks could be perceived as generative tensions, they distract feminists from the "real" work of confronting gender injustices. Offline extensions of online feminist communities bring a live dimension to cyberfeminists. They can create face-to-face events and initiatives.

When we look to those who are engineering the Web, where are the women? While women create and inhabit political spaces on the Internet, these spaces are frequently not controlled and designed by women. The policy- and decision-making realm of telecommunications includes very few women (Harcourt, 2000, p. 28). And for those women in high positions in the telecommunications industry, voicing an alternative agenda, a feminist agenda within this arena is no small feat. Infiltrating the field of telecommunications is a particularly charged area as it is often intensely male coded and circumscribed for expert systems of computer scientists and government authorities with a limited opening for feminist participation.

CONCLUSION

The preceding overview of feminist content analysis demonstrates that it is increasing with the development of new forms of content and virtual media. Despite the varying contexts and media, however, feminist content analysis retains a basic approach of examining the underlying political message of this content, even if the producers attempt to conceal or are unaware of these aspects. It is important to remember that content is not neutral. And as Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore (1967) wrote, *The Medium Is the Message*. The subtle (and not so subtle) political aspects of content in the form of text, images, film, magazines, newspapers, academic journals, and Web sites are a primary vehicle of power.

For this reason there are many organizations and Web sites devoted to unpacking, tracing, promoting, and undermining the media vehicles. For example, Probe Ministries is a nonprofit corporation whose mission is to reclaim the primacy of Christian thought and values in

Western culture through media, education, and literature. In seeking to accomplish this mission, Probe provides perspective on the integration of the academic disciplines and historic Christianity. Another example is the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA), a media-monitoring, research and membership organization founded in 1982 and devoted to promoting accurate and balanced coverage of Israel and the Middle East. CAMERA fosters rigorous reporting while educating news consumers about Middle East issues and the role of the media. Because public opinion ultimately shapes public policy, distorted news coverage that misleads the public can be detrimental to sound policymaking. A nonpartisan organization, CAMERA takes no position with regard to American or Israeli political issues or with regard to ultimate solutions to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Organizations such as these underscore the point that cultural forms are socializing tools that instruct us with text and imagery of how we should live and look (Smith, 1987).

Many feminist researchers examine cultural forms to open a political analysis about content and form that convey sexist, homophobic, racist, and other oppressive messages. Moreover, those who study texts point to the significance of expanding our understanding of gender beyond the totalizing categories of woman and man. In this way, a more complex analysis of gendered representations and relations between women and between men emerges, revealing the multiple political layers of representation. Finally, feminist researchers focus not only on mainstream expressions of content but also on content produced by feminists. Reclaiming public spaces to produce feminist knowledge does not necessarily imply one feminist perspective. Cyberfeminism and online communities created by women are an evolving space for multiple expressions of feminisms. The generative, participatory forms of virtual feminist communities dispel the illusion of uniformity in feminism through the exposure and politicization of intersecting social forces, including gender, sexuality, race, class, education, and geographic location. Content generated by feminists needs to be viewed through a cross-cultural and social lens that reveals issues of both oppression and liberation.

To a large extent, feminist research in all these areas warrants a multidimensional

approach that includes the analysis of content as well as interviews with those who are producing and consuming content. Importantly, integrating these dimensions brings into view the political and interpretative aspects of cultural production and reception.

NOTES

1. Kay Richards Broschart discusses Ida Bell Wells-Barnett as a sociologist (Broschart, 1986). See Ida Wells, *Southern Horrors, Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (1892); *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition* (1893); *A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States* (1895); *Mob Rule in New Orleans* (1900) (see also Duster, 1970).
2. See Karen V. Hansen (1987).
3. See Shulamit Reinharz (2003).
4. See Karen Keller (1980).
5. See Annette Kuhn (1982) and Kathi Maio (1988).
6. See Nancy Grant-Colson (1981), Barbara Hollands Peevers (1979), and Joseph Dominick (1979).
7. See C. Adams and R. Laurikietis (1980) and Micaela di Leonardo (1987).
8. See Sheila M. Krueger (1981).
9. See Judith A. McGaw (1982).
10. See H. L. Rheingold and K. V. Cook (1975).
11. See Susan Groag Bell (1982).
12. Nancy Chodorow and Susan Contratto discuss, among others, Judith Arcana (1979), Phyllis Chesler (1981), Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976), Jane Flax (1978), Nancy Friday (1981), Jane Lazarre (1986), Adrienne Rich (1976), and Alice Rossi (1972).
13. See H. H. Franzwa (1975).
14. One of the most engaging such analyses is by Susan J. Douglas (1994).
15. See Shulamit Reinharz, numerous articles on Manya Wilbushewitz Shohat (Reinharz, 1984, 1992b).

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