

# Beyond the Generational Line: An Exploration of Feminist Online Sites and Self-(Re)presentations

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## Abstract

This article deals with the feminist generation issue by tracing the transition from generational to non-generational thinking in recent feminist discourse on third-wave feminism. Informed by certain feminist recommendations of affording alternative paradigms in place of the oceanic wave metaphor to describe the relationships between different feminists, this study offers the insights gained from an investigation with three feminist online sites, *The F Word*, *Eminism*, and *Guerrilla Girls*, in which these online feminists have participated in building up a third wave consciousness or a third space site through their engagement in (re)presenting their feminist selves and identities. In developing a both/and third wave consciousness, these online feminists have bypassed the dualistic understanding of second and third wave feminism and reached a cross-generational commonality of adhering to feminist ideology and coalition in cyberspace as a third space. Through a content analysis of their online feminist self-(re)presentations, this paper concludes by arguing that they have not only reformulated the concept of third wave feminism but also worked toward a new configuration of third space narratives and subjectivities that sheds light on contemporary feminist thinking about feminist genealogy and history.

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## Key words

third-wave feminism, feminist generation, feminist online sites, self-(re)presentation

## Introduction

Recent feminist development of third-wave discourses has been bombarded with a conundrum regarding generational debates. Although

some feminist scholars are preoccupied with using familial metaphors to depict different feminist generations, others have called forth a rethinking of the topic in non-generational terms. While the issue of generation still remains the occasion of heated and ongoing debate within academic feminist communities, certain devoted online feminists, in their envisioning of this feminist discussion, have instead mapped out a different contour by going beyond the generational line, especially in their presentation of feminist identities. Drawing from this observation, this study investigates three feminist online sites, *The F-Word*, *Eminism*, and *Guerrilla Girls*, all of which explore contemporary perceptions of feminism. In their interpretations of feminism, these online feminists not only carry on a feminist legacy of attending to women's personal voices and experiences but also move forward feminist ideology and politics. In a similar fashion to that which exists in the forms of books, magazines, and zines, these online feminists participate in a modification of generational trajectory by alluding to cross-generational feminist commonalities in a new guise. Yet it is also, as I argue, their resort to cyberspace as a progressive communication medium that enables them not to be restricted by fixed categories such as generation and age. By interrogating several third-wave related themes as navigated by these online feminists, this study concludes that they not only create a broader understanding of feminism but also affirm women's positive relation with feminism and cyberspace in their self-(re)presentations.

Although a number of feminists have strongly criticized the classification of different feminists into generations and waves, the first wave generally refers to the beginning of the feminist movement that demanded "legal, social, economic rights" for women at Seneca Falls in 1848 and finished "in the passage of suffrage in 1920" (Purvis, 2004, p. 96). The second wave, often described as "the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s," was initiated by feminists who advocated "equal rights for women" in a wide variety of issues; this movement lost its appeal during the 1980s because of the backlash experienced in the Reagan-Bush years (Henry, 2004, p. 24; Purvis, 2004, p. 96). The term "third wave" was originally adopted to illustrate the challenges posed by women of color in accusing white feminists of "the racism within the second wave" and has since the mid- to late 1990s become interchangeable with younger generations of feminists, who

mark their differences from the second wave with their different take on the subjects of “sexuality and identity” (Henry, 2004, p. 24; Purvis, 2004, p. 96). This categorization into different feminist waves has caused problems because its rigid grouping of feminists has excluded the existence of a more multifaceted type of feminism, including the invaluable contributions made by women of color feminism and queer theory (Henry, 2004). Therefore, as proposed by Jennifer Purvis (2004), a conceptualization of different feminisms should not be based on the notion of family reproduction and age that standardizes relations between feminists with its disruptive mechanism (p. 107). It should rather see “the third wave as a moment, a consciousness, a stance, a positionality, an opportunity – to assert a new sentiment, imagine a new signifying space, create a point of convergence and contestation” (p. 119). Instead of using the third wave to denote young feminists, Purvis prefers “an ‘intergenerational’ space” that can make possible “the diverse contributions of feminists in dialogue” (pp. 113, 119).

Purvis’s recommendation of “an ‘intergenerational’ space” resonates with Victoria Ann Newsom’s employment of the concept of a third space in her vigorous study of third wave feminist ezines. According to Newsom (2004), a third space means “a socially defined location where two opposing ideals can be negotiated”; it also “exists betwixt and between experience and imagination, between the ideal and the real, in a liminal space” (p. 129). As an equivalent to cyberspace and serving as a prevailing space occupied by many third-wavers to propagate their thoughts on feminism, a third space allows their voices to be heard outside the mainstream media (Newsom, 2004, p. 128). Like the term third wave itself, cyberspace as a third space is “liminal,” a space of in-between or a transitional space. This is like what Purvis (2004) has perceived the third wave to be “an opportunity – to assert a new sentiment” and “imagine a new signifying space” (p. 119). Therefore, the third wave as a third space offers feminists a chance to mediate the two seeming contrasts or ideals – the second wave and the third wave – onto a new plane where there are more similarities than differences between the two sides. This revelation is particularly evident in the online feminist’s active participation in cyberspace.

Owing to the fact that they live in a world fully surrounded by “the mass media and information technology,” much of third wave writing

focuses on an analysis of “cultural production and critique” (Snyder, 2008, p. 178). As a dominant means of online cultural production favored by many third wave feminists, ezines offer a venue for them to create alternative media where they can freely express opinions that are often ignored by the mainstream media. For third wavers, they have marked their attachment to cyberspace by transforming zines into e-zines (electronic zines). Zines, which originated in fanzines, are non-mainstream and non-commercial self-publications distributed among a small group of people with similar interests and goals (Duncombe, 1998, p. 6). (E)zines have been actively cultivated by feminist (cyber)activists because (e)zines serve as the vehicle for the existence of non-hierarchical cultural production. As a result, creating their own (e)zines has enabled the third wavers to make their own political statements by providing their distinct interpretations of feminism with a capital F.<sup>1</sup>

Although my selection of online feminist sites is not confined to feminist ezines only, as I also include a feminist website and a feminist blog, several of ezines’ important features, as listed below, can be found in them. In her clear-cut definition of ezines, Krista Scott-Dixon (2001) identifies three characteristics: building connections between women, reclaiming space, and gaining the benefits from online self-publishing. Feminist online sites usually afford a rich array of resources for women and they help establish connections between women in a more democratic and distinctive manner. Rather than simply delivering the messages and information to women in the World Wide Web, they communicate with them in a more instant and interactive mode by means of online forums such as emails and chat rooms. As feminist online sites

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<sup>1</sup> Owing to the limitations with regards to human and financial resources, zines cannot possibly target a wider readership, but this has always been viewed by zinesters as essential for maintaining their principles and ethos. Nonetheless, the advent of information technology, which makes the cumbersome procedures of self-publication and its distribution become more efficient, gave birth to ezines. Ezines take precedence over zines because they are cheap, time-saving, and accessible to the general public. While still adhering to the DIY ethos, ezines, in which information could be easily, rapidly and massively (re)produced, processed and distributed to a wide audience, alter the central characteristics of zines. A few ezines have, hence, been commercialized by selling products and having advertisements posted on their front pages in order to sustain their daily operations (Bell, 2001, p. 57). See Bell, B. L.-A. (2001). Women-produced zines: Moving into the mainstream. *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme*, 4(1), 56-60.

are mainly produced and published by women, they also create a space where women can make their own meanings for their own goals and purposes. In the case of e-zines, many of them endeavor to recover girl culture in either an aggressive or amusing style, different from the mainstream portrayal of traditional girlhood. Apart from providing an opportunity to reclaim a woman's space, one of the great advantages that the Internet offers to feminists and women alike is its wide accessibility to people who either produce or view the information online (Scott-Dixon, 2001, pp. 24-26).

One more feature that links these feminist online sites together is their nurturing of the self-presentation genre. This self-display or personal writing is analogous to an autobiographical mode through which someone who has been "denied subject status" can present her/himself in public (Killoran, 2003, p. 66). As a "cross-generational practice spanning the three waves of feminism," the autobiographical or confessional mode has long existed to put into effect the feminist slogan "the personal is political" (Jacob & Licona, 2005, p. 197). Refuting the idea of "a unified feminist identity," as indicated by Shelley Budgeon (2011), third wave feminists are deeply concerned with how "individual women understand and claim their own feminist identities" (p. 9). Topics such as "self-expression and self-determination" permeate third-wave feminist narratives and this self-(re)presentation has become one of the "defining features" of third wave feminism (p. 9). Moreover, Su-Lin Yu (2011) maintains in her research on third wave feminist personal narratives that they have helped transform feminist consciousness-raising. This illustrates, as she continues to point out, the third wave feminist intention to "better address the differences in women's identity" (p. 883). The self-(re)presentations or the personal narratives delivered by the third-wavers have, in effect, emerged in different forms of media. One such medium, one that never appeared among the second-wavers, is the production of "technological communities" on the Internet (Duncan, 2005, p. 171). Feminist online sites in particular, as significantly occupying parts of those virtual spaces, create invaluable outlets for new types of feminist self-expressions. Therefore, by focusing on a content analysis of feminist online sites, this paper attempts to interrogate the ways in which feminist online sites - as may be observed in their self-(re)presentations - act as a third space to form alliances instead of creating

divisions between feminists. It will consist of three major parts. The first part explicates the transformation of the generational trope in third-wave feminist discourses. The second part introduces feminist online sites and examines the interrelation between the creation of homepages and online self-(re)presentation. The third part presents a thematic discussion of three feminist online sites selected for this study. This paper concludes by offering a more holistic sense of feminist development through the lens of online feminist self-(re)presentations.

### **Moving Beyond the Generational Line**

For decades, feminist debates about the third-wave feminism are invariably informed by the demarcation set by generational differences. An often-used metaphor to describe feminist generations between the second and the third waves is the relationship between mother and daughter. Yet, this mother-daughter relationship has been delineated as strained and antagonistic. The second wavers are often viewed as serious, puritanical, and manipulative feminist “mothers” while the third wavers are regarded as ungrateful, disrespectful, and self-indulgent “daughters.” Further, the second wavers criticize the third wavers’ disavowal of “organization and theory” as the foundation for “movements for social change,” whereas the third wavers rebuke the second wavers’ elitism in employing “the difficult, specialized, jargonistic language” of theory (Pinterics, 2001, pp. 18-20). As enforced through the power of mass media, this “feminist family problem” – the generational schism within feminist circles (Henry, 2003, p. 209) – becomes harder to be resolved due to the blurring of the boundary between third-wave feminism and straw feminism. American feminist celebrities such as Naomi Wolf, Camille Paglia, Christina Hoff Sommers, and Sylvia Ann Hewlett, who have consistently launched blatant attacks against the second-wave feminists, are favored and praised by mass media as the new feminist superstars and heroines but are also considered by feminists as the earlier third wavers or the straw feminists who make false and provocative statements about the feminist movement (Henry, 2004, pp. 26-32; Purvis, 2004, pp. 95-96). The mass media’s conflation of the straw feminism with the third-wave feminism has particularly prompted a revisionist response from later third wavers. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer

Drake (1997), who have co-edited *Third Wave Agenda*, an anthology now seen as a third-wave classic, endeavor to untangle the knot of feminist generational conflict by arguing that the second and the third waves are “neither incompatible nor opposed” (p. 3). They even go on to point out the similarities between the two in order to redirect this common understanding of feminist genealogy: the third wave is “a movement that contains elements of second wave critique of beauty culture, sexual abuse, and power structures while it also acknowledges and makes use of the pleasure, danger, and defining power of those structures” (pp. 3-4).

As mentioned already, the rift between feminist generations, etched in the American “popular consciousness of feminism,” is very much created and shaped by mass media (Garrison, 2000, p. 29). Following up Heywood and Drake’s contention, certain third-wave feminist critics even feel greatly disquieted by the use of the terms such as “waves” and “generations” in describing feminist history (Sanders, 2007, pp. 7-8; Dean, 2009, p. 335; Budgeon, 2011, p. 157). One of the contributors in *To Be Real* gives the following comment: “To speak solely of feminism in waves, in other words, results in another form of universalizing tendency, and polarizes its practitioners by demanding that they identify with the members of ‘their’ generation” (Dent, 1995, p. 70). Another feminist cultural critic, Judith Roof (1997), goes even further to highlight this generational impasse:

Adopting a generational metaphor means espousing more than a conventional way of organizing the relations among women of different ages, experience, class position, and accomplishment. It means privileging a kind of family history that organizes generations where they don’t exist, ignores intragenerational differences and intergenerational commonalities, and thrives on a paradigm of oppositional change (p. 72).

To think of feminist history through generation and matrilineage is, in the views of these feminist critics, a fallacy that makes feminism lapse into a retrograde state. Instead of being a receptive and generative cultural entity, feminism has been turned into a normalizing and monolithic discourse. As Leandra Zarnow (2010) points out persuasively, “using

generational tropes – and especially the wave metaphor – compresses the highly nuanced reworking of feminist thought and practice during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries” (p. 274). Besides, the problematics of adopting the mother-daughter metaphor to depict the intergenerational relationship between feminists lies in its intensification of the “tensions and conflicts” between different feminists as well as its imposition of a heteropatriarchal and reproductive model onto a narration of feminist relationships which not only lead feminists into strife and division but also ignores lesbian and queer existences in the formation of feminist discourses (Henry, 2012, p. 111).

This is as Purvis (2004) cautions us that perceiving the differences between feminists as generational forecloses the possibility of establishing dialogues between them and blinds feminists from seeing “the persistence of belief, commonalities of experience, and helpful strategies for change” among them (p. 107). As a consequence, many feminists have simultaneously called for a move away from the lens of generational and matrilineal metaphors. Several feminist scholars have proposed alternative paradigms to think about feminist relationships. For instance, Ednie Kaeh Garrison (2000) proclaims that third-wave feminism should be marked in the light of “historical specificity” rather than in the light of generational succession (pp. 144-145) whereas Purvis (2004) accentuates viewing the third wave as “a political consciousness, or an ‘intergenerational’ space” (p. 113). With an aim to delineate an inclusive and diversified portrayal of feminist genealogy and history, Garrison introduces a radio waves metaphor to denote the coexistence of different feminist voices and viewpoints within academic feminist communities in place of the oceanic waves that underscore the binary opposition between different feminists (Henry, 2012, p. 115). Of note here is the conception of the radio waves metaphor as the one that can identify “the multiple and conflicting elements” of feminist theory and practice (Hewitt, 2012, p. 659). This reverberates with Purvis’s assertion that the third wave should be viewed as the crux of “convergence and contestation” (2004, p. 119). Although mapping out an alternative contour of feminist relations has been a constant concern among many feminists, how this alternation can be actualized remains unexplored. In my opinion, a useful notion that can be applied to materialize this feminist scheme is the concept of the third space. As noted earlier, this idea of



the third space can be operated in tandem with a generative and creative concept of the third wave. Affording a spatialized reading of zines, Adela C. Licona (2012) analogizes the third space to be a border or an abyss that encompasses a both/and consciousness and goes “beyond dualism in order to speak a third voice” (p. 8). Since the third space is an intermediary space that embodies “intersection and overlap, ambiguity and contradiction,” it is, therefore, a space “where subjectivities can be reimagined and re-membered and from which they can be (re)presented” (pp. 8, 11).

Although the issue of generation has aroused vigorous discussions among feminists and has yet to be resolved within academic feminist circles, the abovementioned paradigmatic shift in the light of feminist genealogy moving from generational to non-generational terms has been practiced and advanced by online feminists. As a matter of fact, this complex feminist family problem is no longer an issue worth heatedly debating within online feminist communities. And with the omission of generation and age issues comes also the seeming disappearance of the feminist identity crisis. The online feminists’ endorsement of non-generation configuration is mainly achieved through their (re)presentations of feminist selves by means of cyberspace. Their (re)presentations of feminist selves are performed in their exercising of a third space or third wave consciousness through which nonmainstream narratives and subjectivities can be produced (Licona, 2012, p. 13). Before I continue to demonstrate how feminist online self-(re)presentations can accomplish this, I will first introduce these feminist online sites and then link them with a discussion of online self-(re)presentation.

### **Feminist Online Sites and Self-(Re)presentations**

My location of the three feminist online sites, *The F-Word*, *Eminism*, and *Guerrilla Girls* is assisted by the online provision of related links and resources posted within the web pages of several recent feminist e-zines or resource websites. My intensive visiting of these three sites was conducted at least three times a week between July and September in 2015. Except for *Guerrilla Girls*, whose history can be traced back to 1985, the other two sites were established in the new millennium. A common thread that binds these online sites together is their appropriation of

feminism, a tactic commonly used by the third-wavers. The revisions these feminist creators have implemented not only have given rise to the birth of new feminisms but could also be regarded as an act of feminist recovery. In other words, these feminists have not only redefined and reinvented feminism but also revived it. Further, the three feminist online sites under study in this paper, an e-zine (*The F-Word*), a blog (*Eminism*), and a website (*Guerrilla Girls*), all correspond to the basic tenets of user-generated content, which is often described as amateur creations published online. The evolution of user-generated content over the years has meant “increased user autonomy, increased participation and increased diversity” (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007, pp. 5, 8).

Viewing feminist e-zines as an online version of the third wave, Janina Chandler (2002), by drawing from the views of several feminist scholars, proposes that the feminist e-zines reiterate the full spirit of “negotiate[ing] contradiction” and “difference” founded upon “a politics of hybridity and coalition” (p. 38). This key feature of the third-wave is aligned with a poststructuralist and “postmodernist feminist sensibility” with which certain heated feminist issues such as identity, subjectivity, and discourse are far from being unified and coherent entities (p. 39). By crossing the generic boundary, these feminist online sites have definitely marked the third-wave feminist “daughters” as distinctively different from their second-wave “mothers.” In addition, these feminist online producers are the literate embodiment of Girl Power, a catchphrase of third-wave feminism. They have proven themselves to be as competent as their male counterparts in the field of technology by crossing over to a domain that was previously dominated by male technocrats.

While it is true that cyberspace has recently been the domain actively explored and cultivated by third wavers who are both young and technocratic, the youthful milieu in which the so-called grrrl<sup>2</sup> e-zines are

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<sup>2</sup> Often associated with reclaiming girl culture that was set in uproar when a band of feminist punk rockers made their striking appearances in the male-dominated territory of pop music with their big boots, baby-doll dresses, and eye-catching lip colors, members of Riot Grrrl Culture specifically transform the derogatory word “girl” into a positive and affirmative one, “grrrl,” which intentionally strikes a phonetic resemblance to the word “growl” (Chandler, 2002, p. 48). See Chandler, J. (2002). *Chick clicks and politics: An exploration of third wave feminist e-zines on the internet* (Master’s thesis, Carleton University).

produced has also begun to change lately: age has not been the determining factor. This transformation that has occurred online is invariably bound up with feminist sustained uses of e-zines or homepages as a means for identity construction and self-(re)presentation. Making the best out of the freedom that “disembodiment” affords through the use of cyberspace, people are able to explore their different selves by constructing any identity they want (Chan, 2000, p. 274). Creating homepages or e-zines becomes an illustration of self-creation and self-fashion. As Sherry Turkle (1995) puts it crucially: “On the Web, the idiom for constructing a ‘home’ identity is to assemble a ‘home page’ of virtual objects that correspond to one’s interests [. . .] Home pages on the Web are one recent and dramatic illustration of new notions of identity as multiple yet coherent” (p. 258). Turkle’s observation helps explain how feminists construct their unique identities by producing their own e-zines or homepages while simultaneously not being restricted by any single identity that is mandated by patriarchal strictures.

Although people create their homepages for various reasons and in diverse ways, homepages are, without doubt, “an emancipatory media genre” through which people can materialize their “strategic and elaborate self-presentation” (Cheung, 2004, p. 55). Unlike face-to-face interactions, which are unpredictable and beyond one’s control, creating homepages of their own allows people the luxury to present themselves in the way they want to be presented without even worrying about receiving instant negative responses from others (pp. 55-56). This medium of homepages is, in Cheung’s (2004) view, most liberating to people who are disadvantaged by their “misunderstood or stigmatized” identities (p. 57). And if used effectively, the homepage medium could even turn out to be a form of self-advertisement (p. 57). Apart from acting as an outlet for self-presentation, homepages could also serve as a means for self-exploration, opening up another new venue for “reflective construction of identity” as distinct from that provided by a more conventional and private genre such as a diary or a journal (p. 58). This self-exploration as a “reflective project” is, according to Cheung (2004), carried out mostly by people “with uncertain identities or with a more free and fluid sense of self” (p. 60). Owing to the fact that the personal homepage can be revised constantly, users are entitled to experiment with their different selves and “reconstruct their identities” (p.

61). This is as Cheung (2004) points out when citing Daniel Chandler's assertion that "completion of any personal homepages 'may be endlessly deferred' since every homepage is always 'under construction'" (p. 61).

It is noteworthy, however, that homepages often unfold users' identities and selves in real life. As Sharon Chan (2000) affirms, "people tend to perform their usual selves, not some fabulous new entity" because interactions and communications on homepages are usually not instant and direct (p. 272). Likewise, J. H. Schmidt (2013) explicates the notion of an online identity by indicating that it is an expansion of a user's real self within particular social contexts (p. 366). In other words, a user's online self cannot be separated from his/her offline identity because a consistency exists between the two (Kennedy, 2003, pp. 125-131). Further, texts, graphics and/or other virtual objects that have been created on homepages reveal to a great extent producers' or users' personalities; they basically "perform the self[ves] of" these people (Chan, 2000, p. 274). Accentuating users' agency and power, Chan (2000) notes that homepages "are symbolic representations of our selves" and the "performances that we put up" as creating a homepage is a "self-conscious" behavior and it allows people "considerable control" over their self-presentations (p. 273). Chan (2000) goes on to clarify that people do not perform according to their assigned and prescriptive roles, but they *act* on their own terms and in their own rights (p. 272, emphasis added). As with Cheung's analysis, Chan's affirmation (2000) on seeing the homepage "not as a *page* but as a performance *space*" exhibits her contention that online self-construction is dynamic, interactive, and flexible (p. 272, emphasis original) with people still adhering to their true identities in the real life. Significantly, Chan's perception of performance space is identical to that of the third space in which the (re)presentation of self is seen as more progressive, reciprocal and fluid. Thus in the following examination of three feminist online sites, this paper will demonstrate how these producers (re)present their selves in a myriad of ways, with one of them even fulfilling the sense of performance.

The three feminist online sites that will be studied in this paper, *The F-Word*, *Eminism*, and *Guerrilla Girls*, corroborate the finding that an increasing number of feminist women of different ages have embarked on their own interpretations of feminism by constructing their own

self-identities. Except for *Guerrilla Girls*, who do not divulge their real identities online, the other two online producers can be identified by their real names and/or photographs. An e-zine or a homepage as a platform of user-generated content enable online feminists to freely and actively explore their different selves and present them in their own chosen ways. Besides, these three feminist online sites employ distinctive characteristics from both second- and third-wave feminism and combine them in their self-(re)presentation, resulting in more striking similarities than differences between them. This border-crossing in conjunction with their self-making in particular demonstrates the ease these online feminists feel about their identity construction, as two of them resort to their self-(re)presentation in a fun and light-hearted manner. In order to conduct a fruitful study of these online sites, I will analyze them in a cluster of themes rather than giving a separate analysis for each one. Such issues as generational divide, age, identity politics, girlculture, and feminist legacy will be closely scrutinized to demonstrate how online feminists showcase their self-(re)presentation by working on their (re)conceptions of these themes.

### **Reconceiving the Third Wave in the Third Space**

The ways in which the three feminist online sites present their feminist identities and selves are made through their (re)articulations of the concept of third wave feminism. This is achieved by two major approaches: revision and appropriation. Catherine Redfern (2003), founder of a British feminist webzine, *The F-Word*, who initially named her e-zine “Young UK Feminism” in order to create a feminist forum for young women whose voices have often been left out in feminist discourses, was besieged by opposing views from readers concerning the sensitive issue of age. Striking a balance between young and old feminists by maintaining the presence of young feminists while not excluding that of older ones, Redfern came up with the solution of renaming her site as “Contemporary UK Feminism.” She explains her rationale for doing this as follows:

The site will still have at its core the aim of reaching out to younger women and girls and young feminists sharing with our

peers that feminism is worthwhile and relevant to today. But no one will be barred from contributing on grounds of age and the site will become more open to allowing “older” feminists to contribute. However, the “contemporary” tag will ensure that contributors and the site keep focused on the present. Whether analyzing mainstream pop culture or reflecting what’s going on in the modern underground feminist movement – *The F-Word* will still continue to be relevant (“The f-word: Contemporary UK feminism,” para. 9).

By resorting to a broader configuration, Redfern (2003) was able to resolve this knotty feminist problem of age. The “‘contemporary’ tag” is definitely not meant for eluding the core identity of the third wave. Rather, it strives to construct a third space site to accommodate both the old and new elements of feminism. While the parameter of the third wave is extended under the category of contemporary feminism, it does not divert from its focus on current feminisms. More significantly, since the homepage is revisable, the creator of *The F-Word* employs this feature to permit the transition of their collective identity as feminists.

In an analogous fashion, Emi Koyama (2001), the creator of a feminist blog, *Eminism*, articulates her subject position by giving a resounding reinterpretation of the third wave: “I made the following proposal: re-define third wave feminism as the feminism ‘outside of’ the second wave rather than ‘after,’ and as the feminism that starts from the realization that there are many power imbalances among women that are as serious and important as the power imbalance between women and men” (“Third Wave Feminisms,” para. 3). Koyama, who is a living example of what Rebecca Walker (1995) calls “multiple positionalities” (p. xxxiii), speaks through the voices of women of color and working-class women who originally initiated the third wave. On top of that, her advocacy of transfeminism that safeguards the rights of transsexual women affirms her “multiple positionalities.” This multiplicity Koyama possesses becomes her asset because her breaking of “physical/epistemological boundaries” – neither white nor black and neither straight nor gay – entitles her to assert “political boundary crossings” or a third space (Scott, 1998, para. 18). As a result, Koyama (2001) calls forth a revision of the third wave by “moving the focus away from generational politics or

identity group and onto epistemological and ontological shifts made possible through adopting the label, ‘third wave’” (“Third Wave Feminisms,” para. 4). While Koyama does not necessarily attempt to dismantle the label “third wave” at all, she does widen its breadth and depth by multiplying it as third wave feminisms in the third space.

As seen in the afore-mentioned two examples, the producers who set up their own distinct websites have no problem calling themselves feminists, but they are also undeniably self-invented and self-proclaimed ones, which is a characteristic feature of the third wave. *Eminism*, taken from the first name of its founder, Emi Koyama, is an illustration of do-me feminism, a type of third wave identity that renews a feminist interest in sex work (Zeiser, 2008, para. 4). As a feminist blog set up by an individual, Emi’s blog expresses her intention through subtitle as “putting the emi back in feminism since 1975” (*Eminism*, 2015). This reinvention of a feminist self-identity can also be found in another website; *Guerrilla Girls* employs a similar third-wave dictum or catchphrase in its slogan “reinventing the ‘f’ word: feminism!” What these feminist creators have conveyed in their individual online sites is that feminism is not yet over; it has only been appropriated for their own needs and purposes. While this does not necessarily guarantee a final resolution to the feminist family problem, apart from the case mentioned already in Redfern’s webzine, it is apparent that for these feminist producers their self-expressions of feminism do not collide with their identities as feminists. Neither are their online sites heavily encoded by the third-wave rhetoric nor are they circumscribed within the confines of any third-wave politics.

The concurrent elusion of generation and identity crisis could be probably attributed to the disembodiment and anonymity of cyberspace and the progressive medium of the Internet. Although this can only be applied to mostly text-based websites, the disembodiment and anonymity in cyberspace render the Internet as a promisingly free and democratic site where people are unhampered by their physical traits and disability and socially constructed restrictions such as gender, class, race and age. It also calls the essentialist and humanist perception of a coherent and unified identity into question as people could be identified by their self-inscription in codes, numbers, nicknames, and pseudonyms. When one’s physicality and identity become indiscernible, the very idea

of girl, a much-explored demographic group by the later third wavers, is subjected to different uses and is even being deconstructed. Take *Guerrilla Girls* (2015) as an example: their members are neither teenagers nor girls even if they use the word “girls” in naming their group. Having formed in 1985, *Guerrilla Girls* (2015), as a group of “anonymous females who” are named after “dead women artists as pseudonyms and appear in public wearing gorilla masks” (“Frequently asked questions,” para. 1), could be in their fifties and sixties. Their masked identities not only draw tremendous attention from the mass but also entitle them to power and omnipresence: “we could be anyone; we are everywhere” (para. 1).

Nonetheless, their reference to girls has to do with their recourse to a fun and light-hearted Girlie Culture.<sup>3</sup> Their donning of gorilla masks and their role-playing of different renowned but deceased female artists unfolds their treatment of gender issues in an amusing and girlish manner. That is, these “girls” are having fun with feminism in their combat with sexual discrimination. And as they admit online, their purpose of calling themselves girls is to “reclaim the word ‘girl’ so it couldn’t be used against us” (*Guerrilla Girls*, 2015, “An interview,” para. 8). Adopting a similar tactic of humor, Koyama (2015a) makes a hilarious distinction between feminism and eminemism by saying that “feminism is an actual word; eminemism is just a pun” in order to assuage people’s worries about Emi’s “plot to disintegrate and destroy feminism” (“What is eminemism?” para. 2). Yet, in spite of coating feminism with a layer of girl fun, these two feminist producers do not adopt any cultural production of Girlie such as pink color, Barbie, make-up, fashion, and pop music. Rather, they engage themselves specifically with fulfilling and passing on second-wave feminist agenda and politics. *Guerrilla Girls* (2015) fight against “sexism and racism in politics, the art world, film, and the culture at large” and propagate their feminism in their self-produced “posters, stickers, books, printed projects, and actions”

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<sup>3</sup> Bathed in a post-feminist cultural aura, Girlie Culture attempts the reclamation of femininity in a light-hearted and fun fashion, dealing with various cultural productions related to the color pink, “nailpolish, Barbies,” female “bodies, sexuality and pornography” (Chandler, 2002, p. 48). See Chandler, J. (2002). *Chick clicks and politics: An exploration of third wave feminist engines on the internet* (Master’s thesis, Carleton University).



("Frequently asked questions," para. 1). Koyama (2015b), who is also the founder of *Intersex Initiative*, launches an activist group targeting at gaining rights for women working in the sex industry. She is specifically working on the whore revolution to effect "a complete overhaul of our economic and political systems" ("What is whore revolution?" para.1). Nonetheless, in the case of these two online sites, their professing of feminist activism is closely linked with what they have actually participated in the real outside world rather than with their initiating cyberactivism in the first place. They utilize the Internet's potential for great reach and enactment of interactivity between producers and readers in order to maximize the effects of their propagation.

### **Converging the Second and Third Waves in the Third Space**

Apart from reconceiving third wave feminism through redefining and appropriating this cultural entity when disclosing their feminist online identities and self-expressions, these online feminists also attempt to find a feminist common ground in sites where the perceived disparities between the second and third waves can be transposed into their similarities, especially in their rendering of feminist politics and activism. Even though each of these feminist producers imbues her feminism with an individualistic brand and flavor, it is evident that their goals and activism are subsumed under the flag of feminist collective and communal efforts. As discussed already, *Eminism* is the base where the producer, Emi Koyama, develops other websites such as *Intersex Initiative* and *Confluere* to form coalition alliances among activists. The e-zine or webzine *The F-Word*, created by British feminist Catherine Redfern (2003), goes through a similar transformation by expanding the parameter of feminism "from 'young' to 'contemporary'" ("background," para. 7), thereby catering to the collective needs of most feminists in the UK. With each bearing different artistic identities, *Guerrilla Girls* are a savvy and humorous feminist group aiming at redressing gender discrimination in the art world as well as in other areas as a whole. Always conscious of their feminist agenda, these online sites are firmly braced with their political endeavors and actions. Their renditions of feminism incorporate both individuality and collectivity, crossing over to both the personal and the political aspects of gender issues. They not only carry on prop-

agating the well-known second-wave slogan, “The Personal Is Political,” but also execute the politicization of the personal through the political highlights of self-display that are a distinctive feature of third-wave feminist online sites.

Moreover, despite the fact that the ways in which these online feminists propagate their feminist beliefs are rather innovative as evidenced in their uses of online resources offered by the Internet, they utilize these resources in order to adhere to a feminist legacy of building consensus and coalition and carrying out activism. For the sake of sustaining their own online sites, two of them have, however, become commercialized. *Eminism*, for instance, has an icon entitled “store (zines/buttons)” posted on the top of the front page. With a click of the icon, an array of different zines and buttons will be immediately shown on the screen for sale. Although *Eminism* diverts from zines’ original feature as non-commercial self-publications, the zines and buttons Emi sells online are not subsumed under the dictates of commerce-related industries and markets like other prominent third-wave e-zines such as *Bitch*, *Bust*, and *Disgruntled Housewife*. Rather, Emi takes full charge of what she intends to sell online by making a series of buttons and zines based on her concerns with anti-racism and the rights of sex-workers and queers and trans/genderqueers. The zines and buttons are her means of disseminating her feminist beliefs and contentions. She also designs and produces several theme-based activist fliers and calls for further dissemination of her feminist message. In an analogous fashion, *Guerrilla Girls*, the most fascinating site among the three, sells a variety of products such as books, postcard books, erasers, CDs, and T-shirts as replication and reinforcement of their feminist actions. However, unlike other feminist online sites that sell common products, selling zines, buttons and fliers convincingly divulge Emi’s distinct personality, doing what Cheung (2004) explains as a way of “strategic and elaborate self-presentation” (p. 55).

In addition, the three sites under study here offer immediate and responsive many-to-many communications. For example, *Eminism* carries out the interchange by posting readers’ emails plus the creator’s responses. All the online communications are properly guarded so that hardly any diversion from feminist interests is likely to occur. But a trendier way of getting connected with different people is by means of

creating feminist blogs, facebook, and twitter as unveiled in *The F-Word* and *Guerrilla Girls*. Unlike *Eminism*, where the creator uses the medium to record her own thoughts and reveal her self-expression, the creator of *The F-Word* opens up a feminist blogging site where many women set up their own blogs to carry on ongoing discussions on feminist issues that interest them. Others are also invited to join in the discussion by responding with their views in “Have your say,” a device that captures the full spirit of user-generated content or the so-called “participative web” (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007, p. 7). Living up to their declaration as independent alternatives to the male-dominated mainstream media, providing blogs and facebook for users and viewers indeed adds more value to the website as a truly feminist resource hub.

As can be discerned, *The F-Word* functions more like an online feminist resource center than feminist-activism-packed sites like *Guerrilla Girls* and *Eminism*. Although the creators of *Guerrilla Girls* and *Eminism* appear to be simply cyberactivists who “mobilize, produce knowledge, develop resources, and share information” with other feminist cohorts online, they do not perform their activism only in cyberspace (Newsom, 2004, p. 126). While members of *Guerrilla Girls* choose to disguise their real identities by taking on different roles, they post their actions and presentations in the real outside world on their homepage, and they *act* according to their set goals. Enacting their agency and power, they deliberately and fully realize their self-representation by carrying out the transformation of homepage “from artifact to performance” (Chan, 2000, p. 271). Emi is similarly an outspoken and goal-oriented activist who has already organized and launched a series of feminist organizations, conferences, talks, and presentations. Her personal homepage, where she constantly advertises her fulfilling career as a feminist, serves strongly as her resume and personal profile. In a word, these feminist online sites combine both second-wave and third-wave renditions of feminist activism and politics by making the best out of the two and gaining all the advantages e-zines or homepages could possibly offer them. That is, these online sites have cast conventional forms of feminism in a new light by resorting to the Internet as an effective feminist third space for their creators’ and participants’ own uses.

## Conclusion

As a persistent presence in third-wave feminist thought, the generation issue has played a pivotal role in constituting the theoretical trajectory of the third wave. Yet feminist obsession with generational conflicts has not only split feminists but also limited feminist development. Instead of furthering feminist progress, feminist discussions of the generational issue have reached deadlock, causing more anxiety than consensus. Therefore, several feminist critics have undertaken a revision of the third wave in non-generational terms, offering different substitutions to replace generational concepts. As demonstrated above, both academic and online feminists have either advocated or made paradigmatic shifts in reforming third-wave feminist identities. Voices from feminist women “outside” the second wave, regardless of their age and generation, are being heard and incorporated into the third wave. This, in turn, has modified the construction of youth as the core identity in third-wave feminist discourses. This paradigmatic shift in redirecting third-wave feminist studies has already materialized in cyberspace through feminist continuous participation in the production of feminist online selves and identities and the activation of a third-space or third-wave consciousness that integrates both the second- and the third-wave constituents to form a new composition of feminism.

Drawing from the above observation, this paper has conducted an examination of three feminist online sites. While these online sites harmonize with the third wave in reinventing and redefining feminism, they are not restricted by any demographic terms. Put another way, they have moved beyond the generational configuration by incorporating feminist women of different ages and backgrounds as constituents. This recourse to a broader parameter of feminism, which Redfern presented in her webzine, indicates the great capability of feminism to encompass different narratives and subjectivities. The multiplicity in which these online sites have manifested themselves can also be attributed to feminist active uses of the Internet as a third space that facilitates their (re)presentations of multiple selves. In these homepages, the establishment of feminist online or virtual communities furthers feminist alliances and deepens the sites’ potential for empowerment. Altogether these contribute to a better balance of power between different constituencies and

affirm the Internet as a significant third space where unheard ones can speak for themselves and in their own terms and modes.

Last but not least, for these feminist producers, the most interesting part of creating an e-zine or a homepage is the opportunity such a site gives them for self-(re)presentation. As shown above, producing their own homepages and naming their own feminist identification enables them to explore their own selfhood in a more deliberate and complex manner. In all these cases, the Internet as a third space provides them the ultimate freedom to juggle and negotiate differences and contradictions both within themselves and with others. Furthermore, these producers' presentation and exploration of their selfhood does not only stay at a personal level; it has also been developed onto a political and collective stage. In all of these online sites, these feminist producers have fully materialized their homepages' capacity for self-development and self-(re)presentation no matter how they display and act in their own selves. In summary, this paper has demonstrated the extent to which feminist interaction with cyberspace has been conducted positively. These feminist online sites have undoubtedly signaled a celebratory and optimistic note for feminism, one that acknowledges women as producers of knowledge and information and confident users of the third space.

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