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BLOGGING BETTY(S): HOW BLOGGERS USED THE ANNIVERSARY
OF THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE TO DISCUSS FEMINISM

A Thesis in

Media Studies

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how and why bloggers use blogs as a forum to discuss, debate, circulate, and promote feminism through examination of blog coverage on The Feminine Mystique’s 50th anniversary in 2013. Through both semi-constructed interviews with bloggers and textual analysis of the participant’s blog posts on feminism, I explore why bloggers choose blogs to host discussions around feminism as well as how they articulate the relationship between second-wave and contemporary feminism. I locate five themes consistent across the data set, three that address feelings towards using blogs to discuss feminism and two that address feelings towards contemporary and second-wave feminism. These include: blogs facilitate conversations about feminism, blogs build communities, blogs bring visibility to feminism, there is currently a lack of solidarity in the contemporary movement, and, despite the former statement, there is optimism surrounding the future of the feminist movement. Additionally, I draw comparisons between today’s bloggers and Betty Friedan in terms of their use of media. I conclude by suggesting how feminists may use these findings for creating safer online spaces where productive discussions about feminism can occur.

Keywords: blogs, feminism, The Feminine Mystique, mixed-methods.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

“When did you learn about feminism?” This has always been a difficult question for me to answer. On one hand, I feel like I learned about feminism at a young age. My parents were adamant about teaching my sister and I gender equality. We were told that girls and boys could like the same things, wear the same clothes, and do the same tasks; we were given both “girls” and “boys” toys to play with; we performed both “girls” and “boys” chores; we were forbidden from using sexist language; basically, we were taught that girls and boys were equal and that we should provide equal treatment to all genders. So, the importance of gender equality, the principle feminist belief, was ingrained into my mind very early on in life. Yet on the other hand, I feel like I have only recently discovered feminism. It was not until about three years ago — as a junior in college — that I began to understand what exactly feminism is, which issues are feminist issues, what feminist critique means, who feminist figures are, and the intricacies which connects these concepts together. With this knowledge, I started to identify as a feminist and take up feminist research. But the more I learned, the more confused I became about what feminism means.

Then in November 2013, I watched a TEDx Talk video which helped me to answer this question. Titled *Feminism Isn't Dead, Its Gone Viral*, vlogger Kat Lazo discussed how she discovered feminism — through blogs. She did not learn about feminism through formal education and her family certainly did not discuss feminism. It
was through reading blogs that she began to understand what feminism was. By starting her own video blog, she was able to contribute her voice to discussions about feminism. Summing up her feelings, she stated, “The internet was my Feminine Mystique” (TEDx Talks, 2013). This talk resonated deeply with me because it was my own story. Though I vaguely knew what feminism was and what the key issues were — for example, I knew abortion was a hot topic, but I would not have described the debate as about “reproductive rights” nor have known the nuances with encompassed it — it was not until I began blogging that I came to fully understand feminism. Within a few short months of reading discussions about feminism through blogs (which, ironically, I had not initially sought out), I became equipped with both the knowledge and tools to perform feminist critique.

In reflecting on this experience, I began to wonder how many other people had come to feminism this way. I knew I had, some of my close friends had, and the bloggers I followed had as well. Additionally, I had witnessed the raise in both popularity and quantity of feminist blogs as well as the raise in feminist content in general interest blogs in recent years. I also started to ponder what role blogs had played in facilitating discussions about feminism since I had seen so much of it firsthand. At this point as an academic scholar, my first reaction was to search the scholarly research done on the subject. I found plenty of studies on blogging in general, but little on blogging and feminism and fewer still from feminist scholars. Given that this phenomena — people using blogs as a forum to discuss feminism — is happening and little has been done on it, I knew I wanted my thesis to investigate it.
Significance of Study

This study aims to establish a foundation of knowledge on the relationship between blogging and feminism by conducting semi-constructed interviews with bloggers. Therefore, the goal of this study is to discover why bloggers use blogs as a forum to discuss, debate, circulate, and promote feminism. I will accomplish this study’s goal through mixed-methods — conducting semi-constructed interviews with bloggers as well as performing textual analyses on their blog posts. Given Lazo’s reference to *The Feminine Mystique* in her talk, I will interview bloggers who had written on the 50th anniversary of the release of Betty Friedan’s text. By asking bloggers about their understanding of and feelings towards contemporary feminism in conjunction to their understanding of and feelings towards the feminism presented in *The Feminine Mystique*, I hope to shed light on how bloggers frame discussions around feminism and how they articulate the relationship between second-wave and contemporary feminism. Similarly, this study also aims to examine the role blogging specifically plays in producing and circulating discourse on contemporary feminism.

Thus, this study aims to discover how bloggers are using blogs as a forum to discuss, debate, circulate, and promote feminism by studying the blog coverage of the 50th publication anniversary of *The Feminine Mystique*. As research on blogging’s relationship to feminism is still growing area of research with many avenues open to exploration, this study will provide a foundation of knowledge, which will aid in our understanding of how bloggers produce, criticize, and engage with contemporary feminism and how blogs are employed as a tool for facilitating this conversation. By
better understanding this phenomena, I hope to inspire a larger discussion about how blogs, and other new media, can be used for creating safer spaces in which robust discourse about feminism can productively occur. Additionally, I hope that by revealing blogger’s understanding of and feelings toward feminism, the feminist community will expand upon the research on the contemporary production of feminism and the role blogging plays in its construction and proliferation.

Based on the goal of this study and the previous literature, I have developed the following research questions.

RQ1: How have bloggers used their blogs as a forum to create discussions about feminism?
RQ2: How do bloggers articulate the differences and similarities between second-wave and contemporary feminism?
RQ3: Why have bloggers chosen blogs as the channel to express their views on feminism?

Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 provides contextualization of *The Feminine Mystique*. The chapter describes the significance of the text and its impact on second-wave feminism. With this knowledge, I will be able to show how today’s feminist understand, appreciate, and critique the text within their own blogs. Additionally, the chapter explores the life of Betty Friedan to draw connections between herself and the participants of this study.

Then, Chapter 3 presents a relevant review of literature on blogging. This chapter begins with an overview of the general blog coverage on anniversary of *The Feminine Mystique* before transitioning into a basic summary of blog research. Feminist blog
scholarship is explored here as well to reveal past findings, that I will expand on in subsequent chapters.

The fourth and fifth chapters present the findings of this thesis’ analyses. Chapter 4 discusses the thematic textual analysis performed on the participants’ blog posts on *The Feminine Mystique*. This chapter takes readers through each step of the process including the method, analysis, and findings. Chapter 5, then, focuses on conveying data from the semi-constructed interviews with bloggers. This chapter serves to complement and expand upon the findings of the previous chapter.

Finally, Chapter 6 discusses and summarizes the findings of this thesis. This chapter delves into a deeper discussion about what the participants said in their interviews and wrote in the blogs as well as the implications of this study. This includes detailing the limitations of this study as well as offering areas of opportunity for future research.
Chapter 2
Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique, and Second-Wave Feminism

This chapter provides background on The Feminine Mystique and its author, Betty Friedan. This review involves a cultural and historical analysis of the book, including examination of the text itself, reception of the text, and the socio-cultural ramifications of Friedan’s media image. Understanding this information will illuminate which ideas, issues, characteristics, and language were considered feminist in 1963, but will dually clarify contemporary feminism. That is, by being able to locate Friedan’s thesis and the reactions to her text in its own time, I will be able to trace her impact through time to today. Similarly, this chapter provides a basis for comparing reactions to the text over the span of five decades, which will aid in determining themes of what is feminism, what are feminism’s goals, and whom feminism helps. By analyzing these themes, in later chapters I will be able to show how today’s feminist understand, appreciate, and critique the text in blog coverage of the 50th anniversary of The Feminine Mystique’s release.

Betty Friedan

Before the importance of The Feminine Mystique can be discussed, some background information on about the author came to write the text is required to understand how Betty Friedan became interested in feminism and which experiences provided inspiration. Friedan is one of the key activists credited for launching the second-
wave feminist movement. She was highly educated, graduating *summa cum laude* from Smith College in 1941 and obtaining a fellowship in psychology at University of California Berkeley in 1942. She spent about a decade working as an editorial journalist for the *Popular Front* before moving on to free-lance journalism in magazine writing. She married Carl Friedan, a theater producer turned advertiser, in 1947 with whom she shared three children. During this period, the Friedan family moved around to different suburbs in New York, an experience poignantly reflected in *The Feminine Mystique*. After the book’s publication, American feminism became so reinvigorated it sparked a second-wave, placing Friedan as the leader and face of the movement. Though not examined here, in the following years, she would divorce her husband, found National Organization for Women, and author several more articles and books. Up until her death in 2006, Friedan would remain involved in activism and serve as a key figure in American feminism.

Over the years, Friedan has stated that she had not initially planned on writing *The Feminine Mystique* or getting involved with a women’s movement. In *It Changed My Life*, Friedan said her writing the revolutionary text was “almost accidental” and “a mystery” (p. 3). Similarly, she wrote “It just happened” in *Life So Far* (p. 13). She has admitted that everything in her life, in hindsight, led up to the creation of the book, but she tended to keep the specifics as to what unclear. Accompanying her usual ambiguous responses, Friedan claimed her boredom, frustration, and desolation as a middle-class, suburban housewife was the immediate inspiration to penning the book. Indeed, this is the narrative that the American public would encounter over and over again — a suburban housewife realized something is not quite right in her and other women’s lives
so she investigated. But this narrative neglected significant details about Friedan’s past including her experience in journalism and involvement with radicalism. Understanding these experiences in Friedan’s life dispels the myth that she was a passive housewife who just so happened to type a seminal feminist text (Horowitz, 1998; Sherman, 2002). In this section, each of these aspects of Friedan’s life — journalism and radicalism — will be explored to illuminate the role they played in Freidan’s path to authoring *The Feminine Mystique*. Similarly, this section also ties together commonalities today’s bloggers share with Friedan. Bloggers are often cast in the same light as Friedan was — as people who just so happen to write their thoughts and attract an audience (Duffy, 2015). However, many bloggers are trained in journalism or writing and have experience with activism, radicalism, and/or feminism.

**Journalism**

One aspect of Friedan’s life that tends to be overlooked, but is significant to her writing *The Feminine Mystique*, is her background in professional journalism. Her experience as a journalist allowed Friedan to learn industry skills and industry connections she needed to write and publish. Again, this is similar to bloggers who also have professional experience, skills, and connections, but are not necessarily thought to have. And though in *The Feminine Mystique* she did mention that she authored some odd magazine articles, she passed the experience off as something that filled time while she was a full-time housewife and mother. This narrative conceals the industry specific skills she possessed, the rigorous routine of her work, the career ambitions she held, and the
professional connections she acquired in the years she worked as a free-lance journalist. Additionally, it disregards the many other experiences and positions Friedan held in journalism prior to free-lance magazine writing. Therefore, recognizing her experience in journalism is important not only to understand how it prepared Friedan for writing a feminist book, but also to understand why she hid certain aspects of her past.

Before writing *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan had extensive experience writing and publishing journal articles. Her first brush with journalism occurred in high school where she wrote for the school newspaper and launched, with her friends, a literary magazine (Horowitz, 1998). She continued writing in college, serving first as an assistant editor then news editor then finally editor-in-chief for Smith College’s student organized newspaper. In addition to this responsibility, she held membership at a poetry club and launched and worked as managing editor of *Smith College Monthly* (Horowitz, 1998). These experiences helped Freidan improve her writing skills, find her narrative voice, develop a literary style, learn industry standards, and build a substantial portfolio. In short, these positions allowed Friedan to transition her writing from that of an amateur to that of a professional.

Friedan continued to grow as a journalist through paid employment as an editorial journalist for two different radical publications. Her career spanning nine years, Friedan further developed her skills as an investigative journalist and exercised her creative voice in persuasion on social justice issues. While married, Friedan began work as free-lance journalist, writing for women’s magazines. As illustrated previously, Friedan already possessed experience with editorial writing; however she honed her skills with free-lance writing for over a decade before *The Feminine Mystique*, in which these skills would be
reflected. When Friedan lived in Parkway Village, many of her friends and neighbors were free-lance journalists, which afforded her the opportunity to review manuscripts, discuss article requirements, and learn about the technical process of free-lancing (Horowitz, 1998). When she moved to Rockland County, Friedan joined the Society of Magazine Writers. There she met with published free-lancers and gained insight into appealing to editors and following topic trends. By 1958, Friedan was teaching her own class at New York University and the New School for Social Research on magazine article publishing. Three years later, she was publishing this advice in a trade book *Prose by Professionals* (Horowitz, 1998). One specific action she urged in her article was that the author must truly believe the subject, the identity, and the experience of which they are writing about so that the audience could truly believe you. This idea is of particular importance when placed in the context of Friedan’s self-positing as the shackled suburban housewife in *The Feminine Mystique*. Though she held a career in higher education and journalism while married and a mother, most of her target audience was only housewives and mothers. Thus, in order for her to reach her audience and to convey the message she was aiming for, she would have to follow her own advice of making the audience believe they shared the same experience of the typical housewife. That is, she downplayed her paid career and focused strictly on being a housewife.

Additionally, through her work with women’s magazine articles, Friedan also learned the narrative styles that attracted middle-class women, the main demographic of such publications (Aronson, 2010). At the time, women’s magazines were written much like self-help articles, employing the author’s voice and personal details to tackle issues
(Bradley, 2003). This literary style was present not only in Friedan’s published magazine articles, but also in *The Feminine Mystique.*

Friedan also demonstrated an ability in her writing to deconstruct and communicate complex ideas through personal narrative. She wrote an article, “The Coming Ice Age,” for *Harper’s Magazine* in 1958 which discussed global warming and its effect on raising water levels (Friedan, 1958). The article was scholarly drawing on scientific literature and lectures and interviews with scientists. However, Friedan continued to use her narrative style of relating the personal by centering the story on two scientists — Maurice Ewing and William Donn — and their path to understanding glacier movements and global warming. Indeed, at seven pages, the article reads much like an adventure/mystery short story of two scientists discovering something big. This article is noteworthy for two reasons. First, as Bradley (2003) stated, it showcased Freidan’s “ability to popularize serious subjects” by telling them through a personal, narrative style (p. 14). Second, the article caught the eye of George Brockway, the editor-in-chief of W.W.Norton and Company. Upon reading it, Brockway contacted Friedan, proposing a book deal (Bradley, 2003). What happened next was the publication of *The Feminine Mystique.*

In sum, Friedan’s experience with journalism provided her with the skills and industry connections she needed to write and publish *The Feminine Mystique.* Through editorial and free-lance magazine work, Friedan mastered the art of story-telling, gained insight into popular topics, honed an ability to understand her readers, learned how to capture editor’s attention, and established a literary presence. However, Friedan reduced this reality from an expansive journalistic career to a limited involvement in magazine
writing in her seminal text. Friedan might have chosen to ignore this past in order to better relate herself to the main demographic of her book. This very much speaks to today’s how today’s bloggers are framed (Duffy, 2015). Though usually thought of as young, hip people, most bloggers are actually trained professionals with degrees and experiences in journalism and writing. When writing on feminism, these bloggers usually have past experiences with activism, feminism, or another form of radicalism. As shown later in this study, each participant holds or held a professional career and had prior exposure to feminism. However, these facts are not part of our society’s cultural idea of who a blogger is. Like Friedan, bloggers may choose to downplay or, at the least, neglect to advertise their academic and professional backgrounds so that they can relate to as wide an audience as possible.

**Radicalism**

Long before penning *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan demonstrated interest in radical issues like feminism and economic injustice. Friedan first found radical philosophies while a student at Smith College. Before delving into how Friedan became involved radicalism and the *Popular Front*, it is essential to provide some historical context. Friedan attended Smith College from 1938 to 1942 while WWII raged on. Working on the college newspaper required Friedan to become politically active by frequently researching and debating these issues. Additionally, Friedan was a psychology major, exposing her to Marxism, psychoanalysis, and other Freudian concepts. Needless
to say, the political climate Friedan attended college in was conducive to her exposure to radicalism.

Friedan’s initial interaction with radicalism was born from a passion for democracy and an interest in class differences, which would ultimately lead her to feminism. She would write articles in College’s newspaper that would defend labor unionization as American and democratic (Horowitz, 1998). She was highly concerned with creating an environment which provided equal opportunities and representation for workers. During her senior year, Friedan authored a number of articles critiquing the mannerisms of wealthy students by contrasting them against working-class students and laborers (Horowitz, 1998). One such article critiqued the class divide between students under the examination of war-time sacrifice. She was concerned that the wealthier students were becoming too disconnected from the reality of war and the reality of laborers work. In her college editorial work, then, budding radical elements can be observed. A young Friedan was calling her peers attention to labor issues, which provided a voice for workers as well as endorsed their experiences, claims, and ideas.

After her graduating, Friedan worked as a Popular Front labor journalist for both the Federated Press and UE News for almost a decade. From 1943 to 1946, she worked at the Federated Press writing articles about labor practices, capitalism, and Marxism, in relation to racial and sexual discrimination. She wrote on a variety of topics, from unionization to taxation, but women’s issues were often the center of her stories. For example, she published much on the topic of affordable child-care (Horowitz, 1998). Similar to her college articles, Friedan used ordinary, everyday life examples to explain abstract principles and phenomena. However, she called for political action including:
protests, labor strikes, collective bargaining, petitions, and voting. When she left the Federated Press, she began work at UE News, a publication for the union United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America. From 1946 to 1952, she continued to write on popular labor topics like affordable child-care and universal healthcare, but her focus was more narrowed to working and minority women (Horowitz, 1998). Her writing became more politically charged with her participation in protests, direct interviews with workers, critiques of large corporations, and support of legislation such as equal employment and paid maternity leave bills. Her work at UE News was considerably more Marxist as she often directly wrote about the exploitation of working-class women and the role economics played in exacerbating class struggles.

Friedan’s nine years as a Popular Front labor journalist illustrate that she has a past in radicalism and an interest in women’s rights, much like today’s bloggers. The articles she wrote for both the Federated Press and UE News demonstrate her interest in women’s issues, especially in relation to societal and cultural pressures. She engaged readers with a dialogic writing style and encouraged them to take political action by demanding social justice.

These experiences show that Friedan was long concerned with feminism and economic injustice issues before authoring The Feminine Mystique. Today’s bloggers share a similar history. Many of the participants in this study came to feminism in their late teens and early twenties through education and work, as Friedan did. They explained how they discovered feminism through college women’s studies classes or after experiencing workplace hardships. They too became involved in feminism through their work as professionals and writers.
Friedan has stated that she had never encountered feminism before writing *The Feminine Mystique* (Bradley, 2003; Sherman, 2002). While working as a labor journalist, however, Friedan tackled many working women’s issues by providing progressive feminist answers. For example, while at Federated Press, she managed her own column “Wartime Living” in which women laborers’ issues were discussed (Horowitz, 1998). In her column, Friedan called for women to seek leadership positions, encourage other women to work outside the home, become politically active, and create a voice for themselves - essentially, she was calling for feminist action. She equally called for feminist action while at *UE News*. Many of Friedan’s articles focused on how corporations exploited women and how women could combat it, but also how men could change that. She called for government action by supporting bills proposing equal pay and employment, paid maternity leave, government-sponsored child-care, and universal healthcare — all of which are demands feminists make.

Returning to her free-lancing days, Friedan had written a number of articles critiquing gender norms, especially the role of the suburban housewife (Horowitz, 1998). A majority of her published work in the 1950s revolved around a healthy work-life balance, encouraging women to be ambitious with careers. In these articles, Friedan frequently utilized examples of women standing in the face of adversity and communities of women banding together to accomplish seemingly impossible tasks to demonstrate that the audience could, and should, do the same. She wrote that having a career provided a sense of fulfillment that motherhood and marriage could not necessarily provide, an idea that would be the thesis of *The Feminine Mystique*. Though Friedan was calling for systematic change with these articles, she was calling for a re-evaluation of the feminine
self, prompting women to see themselves as people with ambitions and aspirations and
not just as housewives and mothers. She advised women on how to begin linking their
identities to something outside the confines of the home and motherhood as a way of
establishing independence. In short, she was providing women with symbolic tools of
empowerment.

Given this history, it becomes difficult to imagine that Friedan had not
encountered feminism before authoring *The Feminine Mystique*. As a labor journalist,
Friedan noted the ways in which capitalism exploited women, the government neglected
women’s interests, and how women should fight against it. Even as a free-lance
journalist, Friedan’s articles centered around female empowerment — a feminist notion.
Why then, would Freidan consciously neglect these experiences by implying that she was
as ordinary as housewife as others? Perhaps, as she advised in *Prose by Professionals*,
she needed to first believe herself to be the image of the typical housewife so that her
audience could completely believe in her message. Would Friedan have been less
received if she admitted her radical past? Would she have lost followers if she explained
that she had deliberately utilized her journalism experience to craft a compelling literary
style? The answers to these questions cannot be known, however what can be known is
that the strategy she used — one of selective reveal — worked exceedingly well.

The Feminine Mystique

*The Feminine Mystique* is considered to be an influential feminist text read by
millions of American women as it is credited with reviving the feminist movement in the
1960’s (Bradley, 2003; Coontz, 2011; Fox, 2006; Horowitz, 1998). With this book, Friedan was able to spark a national conversation about women’s role in American society, encouraging housewives and mothers who experienced the feminine mystique to publicly speak out against it in solidarity. Mass media coverage of the book further projected Friedan’s message, bringing feminism to prime-time news and to many more Americans who might not otherwise have had contact with feminism (Bradley, 2003). As this study explores how bloggers used *The Feminine Mystique* to discuss a conversation around feminism in their posts, I will provide a brief summary of its contents. This will familiarize the reader with key themes which are the bloggers discuss.

Friedan’s main thesis in *The Feminine Mystique* was that women, in American society post-World War II, were valued only in relation to fulfillment of their gender roles. Specifically, women were praised or criticized for their ability to reproduce, child rear, and maintain a home. However, she proposed that women should be valued as human beings with individual abilities, aspirations, and ambitions, a topic today’s bloggers are discussing still. By sexual roles, she meant that society placed women’s importance in life in her ability to obtain and maintain a heterosexual marriage and produce children (preferably heterosexual so they can achieve the same lifestyle). This projected the idea that a “woman’s place” in society was in the home, playing the role of housewife and mother. Friedan demonstrated that this phenomena — valuing women for their sexual roles — was a very concrete reality through the use of investigative journalism including in-depth interviews with suburban housewives and mothers, suburban husbands and fathers, psychiatrists, magazine writers and editors, advertising executives, and high school and college-aged women; secondary research by
psychologists, marketing executives, medical professionals, and government bodies; and textual analyses and content analyses of popular women’s magazines, novels, and advertisements aimed at women.

Friedan concluded that this omnipresent and prevailing socio-cultural presence was the feminine mystique. The feminine mystique was the concept “that the highest value and only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their own femininity” (p. 43). Friedan noted that the feminine mystique was not developed or conveyed from one organization, but from many and often unconsciously. With World War II’s immediate end, the American public was eager to return to a more secure life. Security took the form as family as many families were torn apart through death, separation, and absence. So men and women married younger and sooner after dating and had many children younger and sooner after marriage. Rapidly many American socio-cultural forces were promoting this American dream — wife at home, suburban house, 3-5 kids. For this dream to be realized, women had to conform to it. Women had to embrace femininity and femininity entailed desiring heterosexual love, children, and home. The feminine mystique, then, was developed in America’s unconscious and projected from government bodies, educational institutions, marketing companies, medical foundations, and society at large. Women were instructed that their femininity was the key to their happiness, well-being, and life. With the suffragists movement’s end in the 1920’s, the Great Depression in the 1930’s, and finally WWII in the 1940’s, the feminist movement was not a particularly active or attractive movement and, frankly, women viewed femininity as an attractive concept. Women were encouraged to believe that being a housewife and mother was as serious business as a career to men so their equality was not compromised.
However, when the feminine mystique placed women’s socio-cultural importance on their ability to marry and reproduce, women began to feel pressure — from various sources — to achieve those two things. They were taught from their families, friends, neighbors, educators, doctors, advertisers, and government that this is what women should aspire. So women began to invest all their time, energy, and money into finding and keeping a husband and starting a family. However, because women were so consumed with this task, they neglected seriously pursuing their education, career, and even creativity. Friedan noted that more and more women were attending colleges and universities in the 1950’s, but were either dropping out after bagging their man or, if they indeed graduated, held only temporary jobs until they married their husband or became pregnant. However, what happened to woman once she married and had children? What happened when her sole purpose in life was achieved? *The problem that has no name* occurred. The problem that has no name was essentially an identity crisis felt by suburban housewives and mothers. Because for most of their life they were defined by their sexual role, they had nothing aside from it. For example, when her husband is away all day at work and her children are no longer dependent on her, what does she do? She did not seriously pursue her education, she did not seriously seek a career, she did not even seriously develop a creative hobby like painting, writing, or piano playing. Because of this, the suburban housewife, was left feeling empty. Through interviews, Friedan found women saying, “But who am I?” (p. 21), “I just don’t feel alive” (p. 22), “Suddenly, there was this terrible feeling of emptiness” (p. 339), and “…I never had any feeling of satisfaction” (p. 346).
And what caused this problem? Friedan stated it was, “simply the fact that American women are kept from growing to their full human capacities” (Friedan, 1963, p. 364). Thus the circle was complete. The feminine mystique persuaded, women and men alike, that women should be valued for their femininity, for their sexual role. This caused women to preoccupy themselves with marriage and child-rearing and limited their desire for higher education, careers, and social or creative work. Bloggers who wrote about the text’s anniversary focused on this aspect. Specifically, in summarizing the text, they pointed to the feminine mystique. They also noted how, despite the success of the second-wave getting women out of the house and into the workplace, the lingering idea of the feminine mystique still played a role in working women’s negotiation between their family and home obligations and their career ambitions.

Friedan concluded her text not with a material step-by-step action plan, but with a general, abstract course of action. This is not unlike today’s bloggers whose suggestions for improving upon feminism are often as general and abstract as inclusion of more voices. Friedan stressed the first key to breaking the feminine mystique was that women must see themselves not through their sexual roles — as someone’s wife and someone’s mother — but as human beings with abilities, aspirations, and ambitions. She equally asserted that women need to contribute productively to society. For Friedan, holding membership at the PTA or being involved with community activities was not considered to be productive society work because it was not work that required serious commitment and usually concerned with trivial matters as opposed to serious matters like social justice (p. 346). Preferably, women would have paid careers — not jobs — which required their full participation and capability. But in order to do this, women must first object to being
only housewives and mothers. They must be able to see housework as a chore to be done and not as some serious task equal to their husband’s career work. They must also see marriage as a legal partnership and not their main reason for living. Friedan believed, then, that women did not have to limit themselves to just marriage and child-rearing and could easily expand into being career women without sacrificing the other two realms. She expressed this by writing,

This does not mean, of course, that she must divorce her husband, abandon her children, give up her home. She does not have to choose between marriage and career; that was the mistaken choice of the feminine mystique. In actual fault, it is not as difficult as the feminine mystique implies, to combine marriage and motherhood and even the kind of lifelong personal purpose that once was called ‘career.’ It merely takes a new life plan – in terms of one’s whole life as woman. (p. 342)

Today’s bloggers discussed this sentiment in their posts. While they too shared Friedan’s belief that women could combine home and work rather than choose one over the other. However, they argued that there still remained obstacles (e.g. class and race) and powerful forces (e.g. corporate culture) which make it difficult for women to balance the two. Two participants in this study directly referenced the new life plan, agreeing with Friedan that one was needed, but felt society, feminists, and women had not headed her call.

In conclusion, The Feminine Mystique was, and is, a seminal feminist text because of Friedan’s thesis that women were more than housewives and mothers — they were human beings with abilities, aspirations, and ambitions. She objected to the socio-cultural idea that American women could only find personal fulfillment through homemaking and child-rearing. She resisted by arguing that women were not satisfied being suburban housewives and mothers, that were in fact frustrated, lonely, depressed, and
even suicidal by being forced into roles defined by their biological sex. She encouraged women to lead their own individual lives instead of living vicariously through their husbands and children. She proposed that women should pursue higher education, careers, and creative hobbies in order to develop their own identity as human beings. She ordered women, and men, to break the feminine mystique by stopping society from confining women to one role — to one space. With these messages, Friedan was calling for a revaluation of femininity and women’s role in American society. It becomes clear that Friedan was starting a feminist revolution. Bloggers try to inspire the same action today by calling out misogyny and hegemony within our culture. Through pop culture analyses, they too remind readers that women are not passive sexual objects, but human beings with their own aspirations who deserve equal rights.

**Reception**

Reception to *The Feminine Mystique* and Friedan were, and still are, wide-ranging. Some appreciated Friedan’s challenge to the prevailing ideology imposed on women. Others felt threatened and attacked, vehemently opposing Friedan and her thesis. Still, others appreciated Friedan for starting a conversation about women working outside the home, but criticized her for her focus on middle-class, white women (a criticism which is voiced by today’s bloggers). Regardless of how people felt, the fact was that people were talking. Almost overnight with the publication of her book, Friedan had reinvigorated the American feminist movement. People began to debate women’s roles in society, women’s representation in media, discrimination against women, and what
actions should or should not be taken. In short, people were debating feminism. The controversial nature of *The Feminine Mystique* made it, and Friedan, a popular topic among the American public which led mass media to allot coverage to it. The conversation that would rage on would allow the American media to position Friedan as the leader and face of the second-wave feminist movement (despite there being many other women who could be identified as leaders) and allow her the opportunity to travel the nation speaking to others, through publicity engagements and media coverage, about feminism.

**Summary**

This chapter has provided a review on Betty Friedan and her famous book *The Feminine Mystique*. This review involved a cultural and historical analysis of the book, which included examination of the text itself, reception of the text, and the socio-cultural ramifications of Friedan’s argument. By examining *The Feminine Mystique*, I have revealed why the text was, and is, significant for American feminism. I have shown that Friedan’s thesis was feminist in the fact she encouraged American women and men to view women as human beings and not just through their fulfillment of heterosexual roles. I have illustrated how Betty Friedan became equipped with the skills, experience, and drive necessary to author the seminal feminist text through her journalism career and involvement with radicalism. I have also demonstrated how Friedan came to lead the second-wave feminist movement and what personal affect she had in shaping the
movement. Thus, an understanding of which ideas, issues, characteristics, and language were considered feminist for 1963 has been established.

With this, I will elaborate in the following chapters on how Friedan’s impact is understood today and explain how the problems Friedan outlined as key for feminist political organizing have continued on and changed in today’s blogs about feminism. This information is essential to understanding how today’s bloggers relate to the 50th anniversary of The Feminine Mystique’s release. I will also show how today’s bloggers resemble Friedan through their writing and their training. Before moving on to illustrate this comparison, an understanding of the blogosphere is needed. Knowing the common themes which explain why people blog, how blogs are used, and who blogs will help establish a link between current blog scholarship and the findings of this study.
Chapter 3

Blogging, Feminism, and Activism

This chapter provides a relevant review of literature on blogging and its relation to discussions on feminism and practices of activism. This literature shows how other scholars have tackled the questions of, “why do people blog,” and “how is feminism being discussed through blogs.” This knowledge also serves as a background against which previous findings will be compared to participants’ feelings. I first provide a brief overview about blog coverage of *The Feminine Mystique* in 2013 to help foreground an understanding of how the blogosphere covered the event. Then, I give a brief account of the general blog research — common findings, reasons for blog use, etc. Next, I detail feminist blog scholarship looking at what assumptions have been made about blogging, how blog use can be feminist, and what common themes have emerged from feminist research. I conclude this chapter by analyzing how blogs have been used to enact activism.

Blog Coverage of *The Feminine Mystique*

The 50th anniversary of *The Feminine Mystique*’s publication received a broad range of media coverage in traditional media, like magazines and newspapers, and new media, like blogs. Though a textual analysis of the participants blog posts about the anniversary will be detailed in Chapter 5, a more general overview about the book’s blog
coverage is offered here to provide a sense of how the text was used in blog posts, which
types of bloggers wrote these posts, and which blogs the posts appeared in.

Blog posts about *The Feminine Mystique*’s 50th anniversary appeared across
several different types of blogs. Large, news-based blogs, like The Huffington Post,
featured multiple posts about the text. Cultural blogs, like Flavorwire, Oh No They
Didn’t, and Salon, also wrote on *The Feminine Mystique*. And of course, popular feminist
blogs, like Jezebel and VitaminW, and feminist blogs within blog aggregators, like
BlogHer, analyzed the text. Summarily, out of the many large and popular group blogs
and blog networks in the blogosphere, it appeared that many blogs which covered news
or culture contained blog posts about *The Feminine Mystique*.

Despite the varieties of blogs, posts authors, and frames of discussion, most of the
blog posts on the text were written in a journalistic style. This is not uncommon with
professional blogs. By professional blogs, I mean blogs which emulate the structure of
traditional journalism, employ bloggers with professional training as full-time writers,
and feature some kind of financial income (i.e. from advertising, business investment,
etc.). Though these blogs may have used humor and story-telling not found in traditional
news reporting, the blogs authors tended to focus on fact reporting (e.g. reporting
information about the text, recounting second-wave feminism, etc.), adherence to writing
guides, and source citing. Though the cultural and feminists bloggers relied more on
biased persuasion (a trait journalism attempts to avoid), they too wrote their posts in a
manner that reflected research and professional training.

The majority of the blog coverage treated *The Feminine Mystique*’s anniversary in
one of two ways: analysis of text or reflection on second-wave feminism. The blog posts
which analyzed the text would focus on praising the text’s ideas, exploring Friedan’s
media persona, and/or locating areas in which the text could be improved. In the
reflection posts, bloggers would reexamine the events from the second-wave, making
note of significant happenings and drawing comparisons/contrasts to today. Reflection
posts also tended to hold a sentiment of “we’ve got a long way to go,” or “its fifty years
later and this stuff is still happening,” clearly demonstrating the personal feelings of the
blogger.

In sum, the 50th anniversary of The Feminine Mystique received a multitude of
blog coverage. Many news, culture, and feminist blogs dedicated posts to the event in
which they would analyze the text or reflect upon second-wave feminism. However, it
was mostly professional blogs providing the coverage, including the blogs selected for
this study.

A Background on Blogs

A blog is simply a personal webpage created and maintained by an individual user
(Herring et al., 2004). Blogs are a very popular communication channel which have been
gaining popularity since the mid-2000’s among Americans. The Pew Research Center
reported that 57 million Americans read blogs by February 2006 (Blog Readership 2004-
2006, 2007). By 2008, the same institution found that “2% of internet users (representing
9% of all adults) say they ever create or work on their own online journal or blog”
(Smith, 2008). Following this trend, by 2015, the number of people who create and read
blogs has grown exceptionally.
Blogs focus on the user’s self-expression through an open and social design (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). Bloggers frequently relate personal experience, thoughts, feelings, and perspectives in a journal-like style. As blogs are available for public viewing though, bloggers are sharing this intimate information in a very open way, allowing countless users to read and even comment on their posts. In other words, blogs make possible for users to exchange personal information and explore their identities in a fundamentally social way.

Given this, blogs may serve as an alternative to traditional media. Theoretically, as long as one has access to the internet, anyone should be able to create, read, and share information through blogs. Because of this, one common belief about blogs is that blogging can be used as a tool for democracy. That is, many feel that because the internet is becoming more readily accessible to different groups of people, blogs may serve as an alternative news source as blogs can provide an array of different perspectives, ideologies, and minorities with a voice (Harp & Tremayne, 2006; Herring et al., 2004; Lasica, 2003; Somolu, 2007; Wei, 2009). And unlike traditional media, bloggers are not held to national, profession-based standards of writing and reporting, allowing bloggers to create, frame, and edit content in any manner. However, as shown above, many large-scale and funded blogs (referred to here as professional blogs) nevertheless replicate journalistic writing. Thus, there exists this tension between blogging as separate from journalism, but bloggers employing journalistic practices.

In fact, Duffy (2015) names this tension as one of the myths of blogging. Noting the prevalence of amateurism in the blogosphere, Duffy found that bloggers would claim to be everyday persons (i.e. lacking expert skill) in order to appear more authentic and
thus appeal to their audiences. In her study of fashion bloggers, Duffy found that bloggers would conceal or at least not readily admit special training, education, or connections which had led to their knowledge of fashion. The myth of amateurism can also be observed outside of the fashion blogosphere. Take, for example, this study. All six participants obtained at least a bachelor’s degree (one obtained two master’s degrees and one a Ph.D), five received professional training in writing or journalism, and four are employed as journalists. They explained to me the process of their blogging, which entails serious research, adherence to writing guides, and in some cases, investigation and interview. This is not uncommon among bloggers. Bloggers follow not only professional writing guides, but standards of ethics. This includes a dedication to factual reporting and attributing sources (Cenite et al., 2009). And like journalists, bloggers value transparency and truth seeking, however bloggers tend to discover truth through participatory communication (Singer, 2007). Especially when blogging about politics, bloggers tend to follow all journalistic norms aside from inserting personal opinion into text (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2011).

**Feminist Scholarship on Blogs**

As this study seeks to comprehend why and how bloggers use blogs as tools to host discussions about feminism, it is useful to understand how other scholars have tackled similar questions. There has been much research into why people use blogs generally (Chen, 2012, 2013; Harp & Tremayne, 2006; Herring et al., 2004; Johnston, Friedman, & Peach, 2011) and even feminist applications of blogging (Antunovic &
Hardin, 2013; Lopez, 2009; Pole, 2011; Ringrose, 2011), but few on how and why bloggers construct dialogues around feminism through blogs specifically (Boylorn, 2013; Mowles, 2008; Stien, 2009). Much of the research conducted on blogs in the context of dialogue about feminism has come from feminist scholars. Typically, feminists tend to view blogs positively, arguing these sites could be used for challenging hegemonic power or creating alternative feminist spaces. This sentiment is rooted in cyberfeminist scholarship on early internet technology, which reasoned new media could promote feminist revolution.

The tenets of cyberfeminism can be traced back to Donna Haraway’s well-known essay “A Cyborg Manifesto.” In it, Haraway (1991) examines the then emerging technologies in the late 20th century and proposes a concept explaining how these technologies affect identity. This concept is the cyborg, a being which is “a hybrid of machine and organism” (p. 149). She argues that we are all cyborgs as we are increasingly and seamlessly blending together nature and technology. To use a contemporary example, think of new research that indicates people think of their cell phones not merely as communication devices, but as extensions of themselves (Clayton, Leshner, & Almond, 2015). As such, cyborgs are not bound to forming identities based on simple biological makers, like sex. She notes, “There is nothing about being ‘female’ that naturally binds women” (p. 155). But, she argues, what does bind people together is affinity. To illustrate this, she uses the example of women of color. These are women who experience a commonality which goes beyond biology. Thus, the cyborg becomes a subject based on affinity, not biology.
Whereas some feminists were displeased with Haraway’s dismissal of biology, cyberfeminists celebrated it. They argued that the internet could become a site where gender could be deconstructed and reimagined. As an online spaces are devoid of physical boundaries, cyberfeminists argued the internet offered a tremendous space for women to communicate with one another and exchange experiences, which ultimately, could deepen their understanding of themselves (Wajcman, 2007). As women could connect and network with each other in this online space, they also saw potential in using the internet to organize a feminist revolution (Spender, 1995). Others have claimed that internet technology itself displays feminist qualities as it relies on participatory communication and community-building, and thus, is a tool well-suited for women’s use (Plant, 1998).

However, some cyberfeminists recognized the political economy of the tech industry, which was (and still is) dominated by men, and believed the internet could be a site of gender reification. To truly tap into the feminist potential of new media, they argued cyberfeminists needed to challenge, in practical terms, how we conceive of internet technology and how we can prevent the marginalization of women through its use (Braidotti, 2003; Van Zoonen, 2002). Thus, cyberfeminism was a branch of feminism which held great hope in the potential of internet technology to enable feminist utopia.

Though the cyberfeminist movement has faded with the new millennia and research on internet communications has advanced significantly, today’s feminist media scholars still hold optimistic views on feminist use of online platforms, particularly social media. Blogs may serve as a potential space for critical, open feminist dialogue. Some bloggers discuss transnational feminism where the focus is on the complex
interconnections of nationality, ethnicity, capitalism, and globalization affect gendered bodies (Basu, 2000; Herr, 2014; Shome, 2006; Rupp, 2008), while bloggers who focus on intersectional feminism examine how multidimensional factors like race, class, gender, and sexuality impact women’s socio-cultural positions in a society (McCall, 2005; Naples, 2013; Nash, 2008). Transnational feminists might perceive blogging as a tool for reaching women across the bounds of space and national boundaries to better communicate universal feminist ideas. Similarly, intersectional feminists might view blogging as a communication channel which allows for marginalized, gendered voices to speak and be heard.

One consistent theme from previous research is that blogs are appropriate tools for community building. Numerous scholars have found that feminists, and women generally, are attracted to blogs because of their ability to connect with others and create support networks. Somolu (2007), in her study of African women bloggers, found that blogs acted as a tool to create a safe virtual space in which women could discuss gender issues. The bloggers from this study were conscious of their choice in platform explaining that blogs allowed communities to form outside of physical location. Similarly, Stein (2009), in her study of women lawyers who blogged, found that blogs allowed for discourse about feminism through community building. Here, the author found that blogs were utilized to create and unite a community of women lawyers where they could share information they felt they could not share elsewhere. Through discussion of industry gender issues and sharing of personal experiences, they built a community of support and empowerment. The same can be said of the “mommy blogging” community — blogs provide a space where pregnant women and mothers
build a community of support for one another through experience exchange and advice sharing (Lopez, 2009; Morrison, 2011).

Feminist blog scholarship also reveals that women view blogs as attractive communication tools. Generally thought of as a virtual space for personal story-telling, reflection, and venting, blogs present an opportunity for women to explore their identities and express their thoughts in a social manner (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). Marginalized women especially enjoy these features as blogs afford a safe space for exploration as well as instant feedback (Boylorn, 2013; Lieber, 2010; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). And whereas Facebook and Twitter are limited in customization, word count, and identity protection, blogs allow for personalization and anonymity. Blogs are perceived to be effective hosts of discussions on feminism, then, because of these affordances.

**Blogging as Activism**

Despite research on blogs ability to advance the feminist agenda, there remain doubts about feminists’ (or any radical group) successfully utilizing blogs for activist aims. This doubt steams from critics belief in that social media does not produce “true” activism, but slacktivism (Morozov, 2009). A literal combination of “slack” and “activism,” slacktivism suggests that users engage little with online activist activities (e.g. signing a petition) because the activity is low intensity, requiring no action other than a click of a mouse. Thus, critics argue that blogs cannot be the host of real social change because online activist activities serve nothing more than to provide a feel good affect for
users (Morozov, 2011). However, feminists have challenged this assumption by finding concrete instances of blogs facilitating activism and enabling “real life” change.

One of the many ways blogs have been used for activism is through women using the platform to amplify their voices, which are typically unheard or ignored, especially in the context of politics (Shaw, 2012). These bloggers use blogs “to challenge opposing discourses by exposing power relations within these discourses,” which is a form of activism known as discursive activism (Shaw, 2012, p. 42). Many feminists bloggers do such that through critical analysis of popular culture, media, and politics. Feminists also use blogs to create safe spaces for marginalized women to speak. Rapp et al. (2010) illustrated that blogging can be a powerful tool in creating safe spaces for black feminists, whose voices are particularly unheard in politics. Through blogs, black feminists can exchange thoughts and circulate issues to organize activism and gain momentum for an issue.

While this certainly affects conscious-raising among the online feminist community, it also extends into physical reality. In April 2012, 14 year Julia Bluhm started an online petition demanding Seventeen magazine reduce the number of photoshopped images of girls presented within the magazine. Titled, Seventeen Magazine: Give Girls Images of Real Girls!, Bluhm, stated, “I want to see regular girls that look like me in a magazine that’s supposed to be for me” (Bluhm, 2012). By July, the petition received over 84,000 signatures, which Bluhm and other activists delivered it directly to Seventeen’s executive editor. Not only did Seventeen pledge to reduce highly stylized and edited images of girls, but the magazine also introduced the Body Peace Treaty, which is a monthly “treaty” that encourages girls to accept and love their bodies.
(Botelho, 2012). The effects of Bluhm’s petition are still felt today with Seventeen still using photographs of real girls and little photoshopping in the magazine (as well as the Body Peace Treaty column) and with other companies with teenage girl demographics (like Aerie) following suit (Krupnick, 2014). And though this activism was accomplished via online petition, it was widely circulated through social media and blogs. An even before Bluhm typed her petition, teenaged girls across America were having this very conversation through blogs. Keller (2011) noted how girls took to blogging to both express their feminist beliefs and channel their activist efforts in revolt against Seventeen. Blogs, then, played a prominent role in conscious raising and support gathering in effecting the magazine’s policy towards photo editing.

A similar case occurred in early 2013. Rapper Rick Ross had released a new single in which he sang about drugging and raping a woman. UltraViolet, a feminist group, took to social media to express their outrage over Ross’ lyrics. UltraViolet too utilized an online petition (in which they demanded Reebok’s relationship with Ross be dissolved), but circulated their messages via blogs, effectually inspiring other bloggers to discuss rape culture (Vega & Mckinley, 2013). Ross issued an official apology within weeks and Rebook dropped their sponsorship with the rapper. Again, through blogging, feminists were able to spread their message across the internet, gathering support and mass media coverage for their causes. Despite using slacktivist methods, they were able to achieve real life impact.

Another way feminist have demonstrated blogs value in activism has been challenging the very notion of slacktivism. These scholars argue that critics of blog activism are basing their assumptions through hegemonic Western lenses, overlooking
the very real changes slacktivism has produced in non-Western contexts, particularly during the Arab Spring. These scholars argue that while a “like,” “retweet,” or “reblog” may not seem to leave a political impact in Western nations or movements, it does in non-Western nations and movements. For example, social media has allowed non-Western feminist activists to mobilize at far greater spend and spread their message further than originally anticipated (Eslen-Ziya, 2013; Zlitni & Touati, 2012). By using Facebook, Twitter, and blogs, these women were not only able to share information, but also able to organize protests. Amongst various social media platforms, blogs specifically create online spaces were women can assemble to discuss feminist issues. While blogging or re-blogging may seem not to create tangible activist outcomes, scholars argue blogging serves as a place to disrupt dominant conversations about gender and to find ways of subverting power from dominant structures — both of which constitute activism (Echchaibi, 2013). Blogging also serves a basic level of activism through awareness raising and bringing mass media and even global attention to issues (Khamis & Radsch, 2013).

In defense of online activism, feminists also give legitimacy by drawing parallels between blog activism and second-wave activism. Taylor (2011) argues that while blogs are a new medium, the ways in which they are used to inspire activism demonstrate the same old tactics of second-wave feminism. She notes that women are using blogs to articulate the private in the public sphere, thus exemplifying the second-wave principle of the personal as political. Women are also using blogs as a space for experience exchanging, which fosters a support network. Taylor relates this to the “consciousness-raising groups during feminism’s second-wave,” where “women would interact, share
personal stories” (p. 87). By drawing these comparisons, Taylor is demonstrating that blog activism is just as authentic and powerful as other forms of activism.

Conclusion

Thus, this chapter has presented an array of research on blogging in the context of feminism. I first provided a brief overview of the blog coverage of *The Feminine Mystique’s* 50th anniversary coverage to give readers with a sense of how the text was handled in the blogosphere. Similarly, I detailed the fundamentals of general blog research, including the myth of amateurism. The literature of feminist blog scholarship shows that feminists tend to view blogging as a valuable tool in furthering the feminist agenda. It also shows that scholars have found that women use blogs mainly as a means to connect with and build communities. Blogs are the desirable channel for this as they allow for the sharing of personal information and identify exploration in a fundamentally social manner. Because of these features, blogging can be an effective form of feminist activism. By gathering in a virtual space, users can engage in activism by using blogs to disrupt dominant discourses, provide critical analysis, raise awareness, build or strengthen communities of women, circulate information, and organize protests. However, much of this research uses methods which rely on text interpretation or analysis of survey data. This study will expand upon previous research by interviewing bloggers, directly gathering their thoughts about blogs effectiveness in creating dialogues about feminisms. But first, I examine the blog posts they wrote for the 50th publication anniversary of *The Feminine Mystique.*
Chapter 4

Textual Analysis of Blog Posts

This chapter presents the findings of the thematic textual analysis conducted on 
The Feminine Mystique’s 50th anniversary blog posts authored by the six participants interviewed for this study. Textual analysis was performed on the blog posts to establish an understanding of how blogs serve as a forum to communicate about feminism, including their writing styles, voices, and tones. I first explain that the participants used the anniversary to frame feminist discussions of working women and mother’s issues. In discussing these issues, the themes of community — community responsibility and action — and story-telling were prominent. Though this themes are found in previous research, I locate expansions and nuances that provide depth to our understanding of how bloggers use blogs to discuss feminism. The findings also help answer how bloggers articulate of the similarities and difference between second-wave and contemporary feminism as well as what similarities they share with Friedan.

Method

Textual analysis, broadly defined, is a method in which the researcher critically examines a text (e.g. a blog post) to identify cultural themes and values. It is a particularly useful method when the goal of the study is to understand how people, “make sense of the world” (McKee, 2003, p. 1). Born from literature studies, textual analysis is
now a common method employed in media studies primarily because of its use in examining and interpreting signs within texts (McKee, 2003). Of course, as a qualitative method, textual analysis is designed to provide depth on a phenomena, not breadth. As such, a defining feature of the method is recognizing the text as polysemic (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014). That is, the text can be interrupted in many different ways depending on the lens of analysis (e.g. feminist, Marxist, etc.) and the personal biases of the researcher. As such, I recognize I provide a very specific analysis of the text by examining the way the participants used their blogs to discuss feminism in relation to The Feminine Mystique. Others, using different lenses and paradigms, would certainly produce different interpretations.

The specific type of textual analysis I performed was thematic analysis. Identifying themes is central to this study as I am trying to locate patterns across the blog posts Braun and Clarke (2006) state, “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79). The presence of patterns is important as it signals that there are shared, consistent cultural meanings across the text, even despite any differences between content presentation or author background (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014). To qualify themes, I utilized Braun and Clarke’s (2006) definition, “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (p. 82). Therefore, themes were determined not necessarily by how frequently they appeared in conversations, but by their relevancy to the research question, the significance the participants attributed to them, and the theme’s presence through the data
set as a whole. Presence means the theme occupied a large amount of the space within the data.

To locate the blog posts, I looked to blogs that were well-known for discussing feminism. Glaser (1978) states that researchers “go to the groups which they believe will maximize the possibilities of obtaining data and leads for more data on their question. They will also begin by talking to the most knowledgeable people to get a line on relevancies and leads to track down more data and where and how to locate oneself for a rich supply of data (p. 45). In the case of this study, I looked to popular and well-known blogs that discussed feminism. These blogs would most likely direct me to blog posts that would qualify for inclusion in my study or would be contain such posts. Similarly, given the relevantly high profile media event of the 50th anniversary of *The Feminine Mystique*, popular and well known blogs were likely to contain a blog post discussing the event. To clarify, by “well-known” and “popular”, I mean blogs that regularly feature content discussing feminism as well as have a large audience and thus wide reach. Statistical analysis measuring popularity was not necessary for this study because any member of the feminist (and even non-feminist) community would have knowledge of, read, respond, and/or link to these sites. The result of my search yielded a number of appropriate blog posts, however, as only six bloggers agreed to be interviewed, only six blog posts are analyzed here.

For sample inclusion, I only required that *The Feminine Mystique* was discussed within the post — the framing of the discussion was not considered. As such, the posts framing were diverse with some bloggers using their posts to reflect on the text while others using the text as a catalyst to discuss second-wave feminism. And while all posts
were hosted in well-known blogs, the bloggers’ ownership on the blog itself varied. A common occurrence in large, popular blogs is that the blog is owned and maintained by multiple bloggers. Likewise, these blogs frequently feature guest blog posts written by bloggers from similar blogs. Out of the six posts analyzed, two were written on a blog exclusively owned and maintained by the blogger, three were written on a blog the blogger was a contributor for, and one was written as guest post on another blog. In the case of the guest post, it should be noted that this was not was not the blogger’s first guest post as she regularly authored guest posts for the blog in 2013. Because confidentiality was promised to the participants, the names of the blogs will not be revealed as it would be easy to connect the blog name with the real names of the bloggers. Pseudonyms for bloggers are used.

**Contextualization**

Some context is needed to understand how discussions about working women were framed in 2013. While *The Feminine Mystique* had media coverage for its discussion of working women and mothers that year it was not alone. *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* by Sheryl Sandberg was published in March of that year and received numerous, diverse reviews. Part personal story-telling, part self-help, *Lean In* provides strategies and tips to working professional women which can help them become more successful in their careers. The author recognizes barriers within corporate culture and societal gender norms which stunt women’s growth in professional careers, but ultimately encourages women to overcome these obstacles by becoming more involved in
their careers — that is by “leaning in.” The book has been criticized for neglecting to address the issue of class (as it focuses on middle class women), as well as issues with race and sexuality. Similarly, the mass media generally drew parallels between the two texts, comparing everything from target audience to central messages. This is important to note because it provides context to the climate surrounding discussions around working women, especially working mothers, in 2013. For example, three of the blog posts mention the newer text and one post is dedicated to analyzing *Lean In* through Betty Friedan’s writings.

**Findings**

While the blog posts utilized different writing styles, voices, and tones, each post used *The Feminine Mystique*’s 50th anniversary to discuss working women and working mothers’ issues. The posts predominantly served to both reflect on the content of *The Feminine Mystique* and second-wave feminism as well as to provide commentary on contemporary feminism in the context of working women. In these posts, the participants provided some background information about the text and the movement, analyzed past feminist triumphs and failures, and then applied that knowledge to comment on the contemporary feminist movement.

Three of the posts followed this very formula. However, one post focused exclusively on reflection — Karen recalled when, in her childhood, her mother discovered the text as well as the discussions the neighborhood women had about working mothers. The remaining two posts focused mainly on providing commentary on
contemporary feminism by using the text as a catalyst or frame for discussion. Emily examined then recent developments on a sitcom relationship through messages from the text while Jaime outlined ways in which the text could become more relevant to contemporary feminism.

**Community**

The most common theme found from the textual analysis of the blog posts was the emphasis on community — explicitly community responsibility and community action. This finding both compliments and expands upon the theme of community from previous research. Bloggers wrote that the only way in which we, as a society, could alleviate many of the issues facing working women and mothers was by taking collective responsibility for these issues and taking collective action to resolve them. This is reminiscent of Betty Friedan’s activist work in fighting for gender equality in the workplace. However, despite participants using *The Feminine Mystique* to segue into discussing what progress had been made since publication, few connected their call to action back to Friedan’s.

Without even reading the content, a quick scan reveals the emphasis on community immediately. The word “we” appeared frequently within the posts (the only exception being Karen’s post). And what is meant by “we”? It varies on the context of the message being communicated in that paragraph. Sometimes “we” means feminists, at others “we” is Generation X or Generation Y, “we” is also working professionals, but mostly “we” means women. The authors signal this directly.
But who “we” really are, are the readers. We are the ones, after all, receiving the message. This signals that the blog post’s audience includes not only those “inside” of the blogosphere (i.e. bloggers and blog readers) to those “outside” of it as well. By using this language, the bloggers are literally demonstrating their call to action — that the community is composed of anyone and everyone. Thus, any person reading the post is automatically a part of the community. And post readers can be anyone. They can be bloggers, people who follow blogs, or people who rarely visit blogs. This is the age of digital sharing, where posting blog links on social media and emailing blog links are commonplace. So a person with limited exposure to or lack of desire to follow blogs can still come into contact with blog posts. Thus, the community is not limited to those involved in the blogosphere — it is anyone and everyone.

It is our duty as part of the community, the bloggers remind us, to share collective responsibility for working women’s issues and work towards solutions towards eradicating them. These points are made through reflection on second-wave feminism and personal story-telling. The authors first explained common cultural norms applied to working women and mothers (e.g. “having it all,” guilt, sacrifice or change of career). Then they explained how these feelings are culturally enforced upon women through examples. Emily used a sitcom relationship to show how heterosexual working women’s careers are expected to take a back seat to their partners. Her argument was that even in a contemporary fictional world, women are still bound by antiquated societal expectations about women’s relationship to home and workplace. Angela and Susan drew from direct experiences in their lives in the discussion of working mothers. They both cited lack of family-friendly company policies (i.e. paid maternity and sick leave, subsidized child
care) as limiting working mothers’ career growth as well as causing harmful emotional states for mothers (i.e. guilt, fatigue, depression). Angela discussed what causes this is thinking of careers in masculine terms. She explained, through her own experience, that the idea of long hour work weeks with no or little parental leave is a very patriarchal concept that fundamentally neglects the family and negatively affects women.

In the contemporary commentary about working women and mothers, the authors made a special note that the community needs to become more inclusive of diverse backgrounds, races, and sexualities. Usually paired with criticism of *The Feminine Mystique*, the authors noted that too often the struggles of working class women and women of color have been pushed aside or altogether ignored in the conversation of working women’s issues. Emily wrote, “As previously discussed, in the real world, it’s not lack of ambition that holds women back. It’s gender bias—as well as race bias and class bias.” In Hannah’s post, she stressed the importance of including more voices in the discussion so that the feminist movement could find multiple solutions to these issues. She wrote,

**What is arguable is that in 2013, the face of feminism is still confined to a cisgender, white, upper-middle class woman.** The feminist movement is begging for leadership from more women of color; from the LGBTQIA spectrum, of all gender and sexuality identities; women without vaginas who have too long been without voices; women who aren’t the 1%.

While this message is in concurrence with contemporary feminism (in which intersectionality and inclusion are praised concepts), it is interesting to note that often this commentary appeared at the end of the post as a sentence or minor paragraph. Despite
their urges to acknowledge and address non-middle class, white working women and mothers, they too seemed to fall into the same trap of focusing mainly on white, middle-class women.

Through different examples and writing styles, each participant made the argument that in order to change the way we, as a society, envision our careers, structure workplace policies, and think about working women and mothers, we need to take collective responsibility and work together towards finding and implementing solutions. Community is truly paramount to achieving this. This is very much a reiteration of “the personal is political.” Like second-wave feminists, the participants drew connections between societal level phenomena and individual level experience in the context of working women and mothers issues. The blog posts also enact activism through conscious-raising and support gathering. Pulling examples from pop culture, the participants bring working women’s and mothers’ issues to their readers, making a case as to why society needs to implement solutions and what steps we can take toward realizing this.

**Story-telling and Participatory Communication**

Previous research has shown that story-telling is given particular emphasis in blogs’ ability to encourage participatory communication; however, I found that only four of the posts used story-telling. Karen’s entire post revolved around her childhood exposure to *The Feminine Mystique* and overheard conversations about working mothers. Among reflection and contemporary commentary, Angela bookended her post by sharing
her personal experience performing the work-life balance as a vice president of a large corporation. Hannah provided a story about her mother’s career to segue into a reflection on the second-wave. And though Susan’s post centered on serious reflection and contemporary commentary, she too utilized personal story-telling in point-making. Thus, story-telling was used in the blog posts to varying degrees. While one post relied exclusively on it, others excluded it entirely from their posts, but most applied it in introductions or point-making.

However, story-telling was not limited to blog post authors, as many commenters on posts would also use story-telling in their reactions to the posts. Commenters — particularly working women and mothers — praised and nuanced the author’s argument by sharing not only their thoughts, but also their personal stories of balancing work and life. For example, on Angela’s post, one woman wrote,

“This topic is so personal and in many ways heartbreaking. When my son was little I was a single mom and also had many top tier VP and beyond opportunities in media. Because there were so few places to turn for quality child care, I had to make choices that limited my ability to take non-stop travel and longer hours."

Another example of story exchange comes from Susan’s post. One woman wrote, “As a 20 year old female about to get married, and also in college, I am feeling the pressures that this article talked about,” then continued on to share her struggle in designing a life plan that balanced her desire for a career and her desire to have children. These are just two examples of the many comments published in response to the blog post. Working women and mothers contributed their own challenges with performing the work-life balance, sharing deeply personal information about family planning. Some of
these users commented via a blog profile (i.e. with their blog’s name) while others posted under a pseudonym, signaling that anyone and everyone was welcome to comment and engage in the conversation.

Thus, these interactions support the idea that blogs are a site in which story-telling is central. To use a quote from a commenter on Angela’s post, “These personal stories are so important to tell. Without them, we’re speaking theoretically and without the perspective of those of us who have lived ‘leaning in’ (for years), and realize there’s no simple answer to any of this.”

There were also varied interactions of commenters engaging in dialogue with one another. On Emily’s post, three commenters speculated in a thread on how the show would handle the couple’s marital issues. One commenter suggested the writers would make the characters reach a compromise so that both husband and wife would be able to pursue their careers via commute. In response, another commenter wrote, “But this…is disappointing because they will avoid having to explore the real issues that this post is pointing out. Happy tv compromise, you know, because the distance is the only thing wrong in this situation!”

The participants also engaged in dialogue with the commenters. This included short replies to comments usually thanking the commenter for sharing their insight, but also critical reactions to questions or concerns posed by commenters. In response to a male commenter questioning why Susan’s post directly spoke to women and not to men, Susan replied,

Men’s reproductive window is far more generous and forgiving than ours. We can make a big show of talking to the men too, but it won’t change the fact that it will
matter to women more. For women the issue is eventually final, which prompts much 30something female angst.

These interactions demonstrate one of blogs perceived values: the ability to host on two-way, participatory communication. The authors did not simply publish their blog posts for others to read, but interacted with those who commented on their posts. Similarly, commenters engaged one another in dialogue about the blog post or the story shared in another comment. Thus, two-way communication is not simply an attribute of blogging, it is an integral function of blogging.

**Second-Wave and Contemporary Feminisms**

The participants clearly articulated the differences and similarities they saw between second-wave and contemporary feminism in their posts through the context of working women and mothers. By combining reflection on *The Feminine Mystique* and commentary on what the contemporary feminist movement, the participants located which issues, characteristics, and sentiments were still around fifty years later and which had changed. The most obvious similarities the authors noted between the movements was that our culture still enforces gender-based career expectations and that working women still face gender-based challenges in the workplace — in short, the very fact this phenomena exists decades later is the defining similarity.

But one of the main ways contemporary feminism differed from second-wave feminism the authors felt, was the emphasis of including diverse women in the movement. Again, the authors noted that *The Feminine Mystique* was written primarily
for middle-class, white women. While making these comments, the women noted today’s feminism is becoming more inclusive of women from different races, classes, sexualities, and genders. The authors noted how contemporary feminism was making strides to include more women into discussions about feminism and allowing their voices to be heard. Contemporary feminism was also thought to have made progress in finding and implementing solutions meant to specifically address non-middle class, white women. However, as mentioned above, this difference is articulated within a small space, perhaps because the bloggers themselves were mainly middle-class, white women.

Finally, dependent upon whether the comparison is with the text itself or Freidan’s activism, the bloggers call for action could be argued to be either a difference (text) or similarity (Friedan). Again, the solutions the participants proposed for alleviating and eradicating working women’s issues was collective and systematic action. The authors argued that cultural, corporate, and government policy change were necessary to creating a more woman and family-friendly workplace environment. This call for action is much different than the call for action Friedan proposed in *The Feminine Mystique*. In the concluding chapter, she urged women to expand upon their identities and fulfill their ambitions by obtaining paid, full-time employment. That’s all. She did not advocate, in this book, for systemic change of corporate structures or government policies to facilitate women’s entrance (or re-entrance after motherhood) into the workplace. This is a definitively individualistic approach. The authors who mentioned *Lean In* in their posts were quick to note that the individualistic approach of that text (to lean in) was not addressing the core of working women’s issues, yet remained silent on Friend’s suggestion. Thus, when considered in this light, the participants call for
community and government action is a marked difference from the feminism found in *The Feminine Mystique*.

However, if examined under the light of the second-wave in general, the emphasis on systematic change is a strong similarity. Friedan did later, through her work at NOW and in subsequent books, advocate for collective and systematic change. Though Friedan strongly encouraged women to abandon their roles as housewives and homemakers, she also believed in supporting the family. That is, she was concerned with addressing the needs of family life, particularly child care, and implementing feminist solutions to those needs. She fought for equal pay, paid maternity leave, and government assisted child care, all which would certainly help alleviate some of the pressures facing working women and mothers. In their blog posts, the participants also purposed these very solutions, citing them as necessary to today’s working women and mothers.

Only Angela and Susan, however, connected these ideas back to Friedan’s work. Angela summarized Friedan’s views on family by stating, “family [should] be the new feminist frontier,” but “Sadly, we ignored her words and instead…we raced up the ladder to try to beat [men] at their own game.” To clarify the reference to men, this relates to Angela’s argument that women conformed to careers based on masculine terms rather than challenged them. Susan, though not fond of *The Feminine Mystique*, respected Friedan’s dedication to family. She wrote,

> It turns out that Friedan offered a decent overview 50 years ago. She trashed domesticity in the body of *The Feminine Mystique*, but the Epilogue, A New Life Plan for Women, is more sober. She warned against ‘one thing at a time compromises’ that were not compatible with women’s lives.
Susan continued on to relate this to the idea of community responsibility and action. She explained that “one thing at a time compromises” are compromises that place one aspect of women’s lives over another — family over career, career over family — rather than linking these aspects together to produce a better home life and career. Susan felt that by ignoring Friedan’s words and pursuing the “career mystique,” feminists forgot the family entirely which explains why, in her view, the community has failed in addressing working women and mothers issues.

The fact that more bloggers did not make the connection between Freidan’s call to action raises questions about whether the other bloggers did not have a complete understanding of Friedan’s activism or if they purposefully chose to focus only on The Feminine Mystique rather than Friedan. However, given the comparison between the entire second-wave movement (and thus beyond Friedan’s involvement) to contemporary feminism, this can be considered a similarity. Second-wave feminism is well-known for stressing and implementing collective and systematic action, which is what the bloggers called for. And as shown, Friedan herself advocated for working women and mothers rights, reminding other feminists that both family and work life must be balanced.

Through their posts on The Feminine Mystique, the differences and similarities the participants identified between second-wave and contemporary feminism were made clear. They felt women were still subject to archaic cultural notions of career and family life, but that the contemporary movement was inviting more diverse women to help locate solutions to working women’s issues. The women also strongly advocated for collective responsibility and action, which could be either similar or dissimilar to second-wave feminism depending on reference to The Feminine Mystique, but ultimately, I argue
it is a strong similarity. Like Friedan, the bloggers argued for sweeping workplace change, achieved through formal government action, corporate policy action, and societal action. And though, aside from Angela and Susan, the participants may not have drawn a clear comparison between themselves and Friedan, they did articulate and support her views. By making the same conclusion as Friedan, they are calling for the same action and thus, express the same vision.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This section served to present and analyze the results of thematic textual analysis of the blogs posts. Looking for patterns across the blog posts written by the participants for the 50th anniversary of *The Feminine Mystique*, I found an expansion upon the findings of previous blog scholarship. Specifically, the posts show an expansion upon the theme of community and story-telling as well as provide nuanced articulations of the similarities and difference between second-wave and contemporary feminism.

The textual analysis also reveals the answer to RQ1: How have bloggers used their blogs as a forum to create discussions about feminism? In their blog posts, the participants exemplified the features blogs are found to possess as a communication tool — story-telling and two-way conversations. Most of the participants shared their own personal stories to strengthen their arguments as well as to reflect upon the second-wave and *The Feminine Mystique*. Conversations also occurred in the comment’s section, allowing commenters to share not only their own stories, but also to engage other commenters in dialogue. The bloggers themselves would even contribute to the new
discussion happening outside of their original post. This supports the idea that blogs are a suitable venue for hosting discussions conversations because of their reliance and encouragement of story-telling and participatory communication. And related to the concept of two-way communication is the idea of community.

As previous research shows, one of the strengths attributed to blogs is its ability to build and strengthen communities. The textual analysis performed here revealed an expansion upon this definition. The participants wrote that anyone and everyone belonging to the community — their frequent use of “we” and direct address to readers signaled this clearly. Thus, community includes those who are outside the blogosphere. And with a value of community came the value of (and necessity for) collective responsibility and action.

Addressing RQ2, the textual analysis revealed key insights about how bloggers articulate the differences and similarities between second-wave and contemporary feminism. One apparent similarity the bloggers communicated in their posts was that our society still imposes antiquated gender ideals onto women, especially in the context of the workplace. Many of the participants noted how the struggles working women and mothers face today are comparable to the struggles experienced in decades past, specifically in that family and home life was assumed to take first place in their lives.

Consistent with the participants’ feelings toward community, their posts showed their belief that the contemporary feminist movement was becoming more inclusive of diversity. This was expressed through contrasting with second-wave feminism, which was dominated by middle-class, white women, and *The Feminine Mystique*, which was written about and for middle-class, white women. Though they felt this was a marked
difference, it should be noted that the women being discussed within their posts were mainly middle-class, white women. Likewise the claim of difference appeared as almost an afterthought. Thus, their blog posts mimicked *The Feminine Mystique* in that the working women being addressed were the same demographic. However, instead of completely ignoring issues of class, race, sexuality, and gender, they made a quick note about it. So though the participants felt contemporary feminism differentiated itself from second-wave feminism in the respect of diversity, my analysis shows that they used their posts in the same manner as Friedan did during the second-wave.

In the same vein, the bloggers stressed collective responsibility and action towards improving and solving working women’s issues, which can be considered another similarity between second-wave and contemporary feminism. Though Friedan offered no such suggestion in *The Feminine Mystique*, she did in her later books and activist work advocate for systematic change to address these issues. Additionally, a hallmark of second-wave feminism was the call for systematic change — the same means through which the bloggers are seeking solutions. However, this connection between the two movements was not as clearly articulated as the above two, that suggests the authors may have thought the connection was self-evident and required no further explanation or they may have made the connection unwittingly. In either case, the emphasis on collective responsibility and action was clear and appears as a similarity between contemporary and second-wave feminism.

And, of course, there lies a similarity between the bloggers and Friedan. As noted elsewhere, Friedan’s writing style relied on narrative. She was also known for explaining abstract concepts in simple, concrete terms. These bloggers have done just that in their
posts on *The Feminine Mystique*. They used story-telling to open and/or close their posts and even in agreements. They also used popular culture — the text itself, but also sitcoms and *Lean In* — to work through working women and mother’s issues.

In the following chapter, I speak directly with the bloggers to see whether there is consistency between what they wrote and how they feel and why they chose blogs to discuss feminism. Have they chosen blogs to discuss feminism because it allows for story-telling and two-way participation? Do they feel a sense of community through blogs? Does blogging help inform their understanding of contemporary feminism? As I will show, the themes of community and story-telling will be reinforced, new themes shall emerge, and more connections between the bloggers and Friedan will be revealed.
Chapter 5

Interviews with Bloggers about Feminism

This chapter discusses the findings of the semi-constructed interviews conducted with six bloggers who had written blog posts on the 50th anniversary of *The Feminine Mystique*. After examining their blog posts, I spoke directly with bloggers about why and how they use blogs to host discussions about feminism. First, I detail my method, and then I present the results from analysis of the interviews which addresses why bloggers chose blogs to express their views on feminism and how they articulate the differences and similarities between second-wave and contemporary feminism. In total there are five themes present across interviews. While discussing blogs, all of the participants expressed that blogs were an excellent communication tool for (a) facilitating feminist conversations, (b) building feminist communities, and (c) bringing visibility to feminism. When discussing feminism, the participants feelings towards the contemporary movement were that (a) there is a lack of solidarity in the contemporary movement, but (b) they are optimistic about the future of the movement.

Method

The goal of this study is to discover how bloggers use blogs as a forum to discuss, debate, circulate, and promote feminism. Thus, I employed semi-constructed interview as my method. As Lindlof and Taylor (2011) state, “interviews are particularly well suited
to *understanding the social actor’s experience, knowledge, and worldviews*” (p. 173). Because I am trying to understand bloggers’ experiences and knowledge of feminism and blogging, interviewing is the desirable method as it allows participants to directly share their stories with the researcher. Furthermore, Lindlof and Taylor (2011) write, “In addition, qualitative interviews can be vehicles for exploring people’s *explanations*” (p. 174). Explanations for thoughts, views, and actions are often complicated and multifaceted and, therefore, difficult to express and interpret. Other methods, like surveys, rely on participants expressing their thoughts through fixed options the researcher supplies. With focus groups, strong personalities tend to dominate discussion, discouraging other participants from sharing their explanations. With interviews, participants can provide their explanations in their own words in their own time.

DeVault and Gross (2007) also note, “Interviewing is powerful in part because it involves relatively direct exchanges of views and perspectives among researchers, participants, and readers” (p. 192). Interviewing allows me to speak directly with participants about their thoughts, views, feelings, and experiences. Within this direct exchange, I am able to listen to the exact words they choose; to hear the different emotions that emerge from different experiences; to note instances of reflection, contemplation, and hesitation; and also to ask for clarification. It is a method that relies on both parties — researcher and participant — having a discussion about the research topic. But also, as DeVault and Gross underscore, interviews allow readers to engage in the conversation as well. Through interviews, I am able to present readers with direct quotations from the participants. This allows readers to understand how the participants
articulate their thoughts, reasoning, actions, and feelings, and thus, gives readers access to participants perspectives.

Prior to conducting the interviews (and even before participant recruitment), I developed a plan to build rapport with the interviewees. This is crucial to gaining the trust of the interviewee, especially when the aim of the interview is to gather personal and political thoughts on a phenomena. Given the feminist aim of this study, I looked to feminist approaches to trust building. Harrison et al. (2001) and Hesse-Biber (2014) stress that the researcher must be aware of the power relationship between interviewer and interviewee and seek to reduce it. Mindful of this, I focused on diminishing power dynamic between researcher-participant by amplifying what was shared in common between the participants and me. I utilized this approach as early as recruitment. For example, after participants replied to the initial recruitment email (which contained the same content for all participants), subsequent email content was personalized to reduce interviewer/interviewee power dynamics. As the majority of participants identified interests in feminism, women’s studies, and new media, I was able to build rapport quickly by discussing these shared interests. One participant (Susan) did not identify as a feminist so I focused on building trust with her by discussing our shared interests in seeking diverse standpoints, opinions, and experiences. Additionally, Susan had past negative experiences with interviews about feminism so to further establish trust, I promised her she would be able to view any direct quotations attributed to her with context as to ensure her voice would not be misrepresented or manipulated.
Participants

The needs of this study required people who blog about feminism regularly. Again, “regularly” here means that the blogger consistently writes blog posts about feminism and is known for doing so. This was done to ensure the blogger held a vested interest in and knowledge of feminism. Thus, I employed purposeful sampling participant recruitment. Purposeful sampling is simply a strategic selection of samples based on the aim of the study (Patton, 1990). Simply, purposeful sampling means, “the sample is always intentionally selected according to the needs of the study” (Coyne, 1997, p. 629).

To understand why people use blogs to express their thoughts on feminism, I wanted my sample to include people from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and opinions. That is, I attempted to recruit participants who identified as feminists as well as non-feminists. However, of the non-feminists contacted, only one expressed interest in participating in the study.

As discussed in the previous chapter, I located my sample from blogs which are well-known for discussing feminism. I chose to examine posts within popular blogs because (a) given their wide reach and influence, these blogs would want to provide coverage of the large feminist event that was the 50th anniversary of The Feminine Mystique and (b) these blogs — by virtue of their popularity — acted as a source of knowledge, which allowed me to locate relevant and rich data (Glaser, 1978). And once I identified qualifying blog posts, I recruited participants via email. This email introduced who I was, explained the project, and asked for their participation in the study.
As the 50th anniversary of the release of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* was as the center of sample inclusion, I developed additional criteria. Logically, the first criteria for sample inclusion was that the participant had to have written a blog post about *The Feminine Mystique* sometime in 2013 (the year of the anniversary). It might have been an article dedicated to analyzing the text or a post which used the text as a catalyst to discuss second-wave feminism. Thus, I only required that *The Feminine Mystique* was discussed within the post — the framing of the discussion was not considered for inclusion or exclusion. Additionally, many who blog write content not only on their own blogs, but on other blogs well (called “guest posts”). This is especially common when writing on large or popular events such as the anniversary of *The Feminine Mystique*. Therefore, my sample included those who had written blog posts on their own blogs as well as those who had written for other blogs.

The six different bloggers who agreed to participate in this study share some commonalities as well as some differences. First, all were women. Five were white (with one specifying she was ethnically Jewish) and one was Asian-American. The participants varied in age with the youngest being 24 and the oldest being 59. Five of the women identified as feminists and one explicitly as non-feminist. Though the participants were bloggers, most considered blogging a secondary occupation or hobby. Of the main occupations identified, four were journalists, one was an artist, and one was a full-time blogger. Within the journalist subcategory, three were freelance journalists and one was a reporter for a newspaper. See table 1 for participant description information.

Because of her unique position in this study, Susan’s identity as non-feminist who blogs about feminism requires clarification. Again, Susan is not an anti-feminist, but
simply a non-feminist. This means that she does not inherently oppose feminism, feminist goals, or feminists, but she also does not fully support or embrace these things either. As a former lawyer interested in women’s rights issues, she sees the historic and political value of feminism, but, as Right-winged, she just supports feminist aims which align with typical conservative values. For example, as she values family and tradition, she supports feminist solutions to workplace policies like paid maternity leave because such a solution allows families the function healthily. She sees a great need for feminism in non-Western nations, but sees little need for it in Western nations. That is, she believes many of the major victories for women’s rights have been won in Western nations. Because of this, she finds most “pop culture” feminist critique to be unimportant if not irrelevant. As such, her blog posts contain a variety of pro-feminist pieces and non-feminist pieces. For example, she has written a number of blog posts on violence against women and equal pay. She gets cited for this work in feminist blogs so, for those who have only read one of her posts, they assume she is a feminist blogger only to be surprised that, after research, she is not. This upsets Susan because though she dismisses some feminist goals, she still sees applications for feminism. In sum, her feminist views are often too liberal for conservatives, but too conservative for feminists.

Interviews

I conducted the interviews between September and October 2014. Before each interview, I stated the purpose of the study, supplied a preview of questions to come, and, in accordance to IRB guidelines, provided the participants with information about
consent which included the promise of anonymity. I confirmed their verbal consent before commencing the interview. The interviews were conducted via phone call. Again, one interview required an email follow-up in which the participant was allowed to view interview quotations attributed to her. This was done as an extension of trust building and did not affect the appearance or exclusion of the quotations. That is, the quotes which were emailed and viewed are exactly the same as presented here.

I began the interview by first asking typical warm-up questions (e.g. “What’s your age?” “What’s your ethnicity?” and “Could you tell me a about your career background?”) to ease participants into speaking. Then, I initiated the semi-structured interview. While interviewing, I was equipped with a physical interview guideline which would be referenced to ensure planned questions were asked. However, as a feminist researcher, I also practiced mindful listening to ensure that unprompted dialogue and clarifying and probing questions could occur (DeVault & Gross, 2007; Hesse-Biber, 2014; Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011). Furthermore, at the end of each interview, I asked my participants open-ended questions to return to topics only briefly covered and also to invite the participants to share additional information (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The interviews lasted between 32 and 53 minutes.
Table 1: Participant Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Monthly Visitors</th>
<th>Blog Age (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>80,000</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>60,000</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>60,000</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis

Interviews were recorded to aid in my transcription. In addition to this, I used a notebook to note potential emerging themes with informal codes. I transcribed the interviews within one week and stored both the text and audio files on a USB drive. While transcribing individual interviews, I referenced my notebook and formally recorded instances of recurring themes by developing formal codes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Then, I compared the six transcriptions to locate shared experiences to identify larger themes and areas of divergence. To qualify themes, I followed the same definition of a theme from Braun and Clarke (2006) as I did with the analysis of the participants blog posts — I identified themes by relevancy, significance, and presence.
After generating a list of themes, I reviewed the transcripts again to confirm such themes were indeed present and that I was accurately representing my participant’s voices (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hesse-Biber, 2014; Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011).

The Five Themes

After several rounds of analysis, I found five themes. These themes are divided into the two larger categories — blogs and contemporary feminism — based on the central subject articulated. While discussing blogs, the participants, regardless of feminist identification, expressed that blogs were an excellent communication tool for (a) facilitating conversations around feminism, (b) building feminist communities, and (c) bringing visibility to feminism. When discussing feminism, the participants feelings towards the contemporary movement were that (a) there is a lack of solidarity in the contemporary movement, but (b) they are optimistic about the future of the movement.

Conversation Facilitator

One of the most prominent themes from the interviews was that blogs facilitate conversations about feminism. Fundamentally, blogs are an interactive, digital medium which is built upon people exchanging information in a social manner. So, by definition, blogs are well-suited for facilitating conversations. Adding in another dimension, the participants explained that blogs were a relatively accessible medium (i.e. just a wifi connection and device needed) in which nearly anyone could share their thoughts,
feelings, stories, perspectives, and experiences. Angela said, “Blogging breaks those barriers down and allows women and the stories that we experience in our daily lives [to be shared].” Similarly, Karen said, “I think it’s a media that you get reactions — you get people thinking. I think it’s terrific.”

The participants also noted that conversations do not end with publishing a blog post. Conversations could occur within blog, but also outside of the original post (i.e. the comment’s section) or could result in conversations outside of the blog (i.e. email, face-to-face, etc.) In essence, blogs serve to prompt dialogue. Hannah said, “And with blogging, it really starts a new conversation in the comments...” She continued on stating how people can bring up new points of discussion or introduce different angles to analyze points made by the blogger to start a new and different conversation in the comment’s section. This is also a place where different users can join the conversation, even if they do not keep a blog themselves. Again, the original blog post can spark a dialogue. This supports the findings of the textual analysis in which I found participatory-communication to be key in bloggers using blogs to discuss feminism.

Karen explained that a great deal of conversations about feminism she has with others occurs outside of the blog. She said that she often receives emails from readers and they then have a discussion about something she posted on her blog. Karen said, I can engage in a dialogue. It’s satisfying if a story I’ve written or a visuals I present elicit a response that has gotten someone to think about something and then we’ll often exchange — there will be feedback.

In terms of blogs being a logical fit for feminist discussion, the women placed emphasis on the power of story-telling. Story-telling, they felt, was an important aspect
for discussions about feminism as story-telling allows one to use personal information in point making or sharing information that might otherwise might not be known. Thus, blogs were an effective means to bring one’s personal story to discussions about feminism. This was often described as “shining light.”

Angela said,

I think it goes back to by shining a light on issues that might have been hidden or not given the credence it deserves, we now have a chance to actually speak our truths [and] talk about our experiences.

Jaime said,

So maybe helping to shed light on the complexities of these debates and that we can actually then talk about them and put things into action that will actually address some of the ongoing inequality issues and things like that.

A quote from Hannah summarizes the collective feelings of the participants well. She said, “So it’s a conversation as well as media that you read. It’s a two-way conversation.” For her and the rest of the participants, blogging was an interactive communications tool which lent itself nicely to conversations about feminism.

This relates back to previous feminist research on blogging as well as the results of the textual analysis. The participants felt blogs were effective communication tools because of their belief in that they, as an online platform, were readily accessible, supported participatory communication, and encouraged story-telling. The way in which the women explained this, however, helps us understand why they hold these feelings. It is clear that blog affordances are believed to allow women with a platform to speak and be heard. That is, a phenomena, event, or issue with most people might not take notice of
or not realize is universal could be brought to attention via blogging. This relates back to the notion of blog activism. These bloggers are using their blogs for conscious-raising, but also as a means of community building, which is shown in the next section.

**Community Building**

Another major theme present in every participant’s interview was that blogs aid in the construction of on-line communities in which conversations about feminism occur. Note the use of “communities” over “feminist communities.” The participants felt that conversations about feminism could occur in non-feminist communities so they felt it was important to support any space in which this dialogue could occur. However, as will be exemplified later, the implicit assumption was that these communities were feminist ones. There were two components to community building: the first was the literal building of a community and the second the connecting of the community.

The first component to community building was the literal construction of an online community. The participants expressed how easy it is to make their own communities through blogs. For example, all one needed to do was start a blog and start a conversation. Soon after, dedicated readers, commenters, and other bloggers would form the community. Angela said, “[Bloggers are] just sharing their life stories. And when your voice is heard and when you have a platform to let your voice be heard, you then create community and opportunity for clarity on your truth.”

The second component to community building was simply that blogs allow users to connect with an existing community. Emily said, “It’s literally a great tool in terms of
like connecting different threads of feminism together.” For her, blogs help connect
different ideas together which then brings different communities together to discuss
feminism. Blogs were particularly useful when one’s physical community did not engage
in dialogue about feminism. Hannah said, “And now people are able to expand [their]
community and think totally outside of their social groups and their community and city
and country even.” And once inside the community, one could have an effect on
contemporary feminism. Jaime said, “You get to potentially shape not just the discussion,
but you get to kind of shape the movement.”

However, these online communities in which conversations about feminism occur
are selective in whom they allow in the conversation. Though Susan felt blogs were a
good way to share ideas, stories, and perspectives, she said, “I rarely get any
engagement” from feminist bloggers. She described how she would write blog posts
which discussed feminism and then receive invitations to join a group blog or author a
guest blog post and thus, engage in the community. However, once these bloggers
learned she did not identify as a feminist, her invitation to the community was revoked,
thus revealing that the communities the other bloggers had spoken of were implicitly
feminist communities. She felt she was being ignored and isolated from communities
which discussed feminism. To sum up her feeling, she said, “So I know some of them
read, but I just don’t get any interaction, I don’t get any discussion, I don’t get a reply. So
I just keep blogging.”

Like previous blog scholarship, community-building proved to be a major
component as to why the participants engaged with blogging. Again, blogs are
convenient in that there are online spaces not bound by geographic boundaries. This
provides opportunity for women to locate feminist discussions when such discussions are lacking in their physical communities. And with being an online space, it is easy through use of keywords or blog rolls to connect with different strands of feminist thought or women of different backgrounds. The participant clearly praised blogs for this ability. However, Susan’s view complicates this notion of community-building. She found without the feminist label it was difficult for her to engage with the community. This is especially remarkable because Susan has been invited to join on multiple occasions until her affiliation is revealed.

Visibility Generator

Participants explained that blogs bring a great deal of visibility to feminism. They noted how blogs are now a common medium that people use and that made blogs a great tool for discourse about feminism. They explained that technical features like keywords help to promote blogs or blog posts, which in turns increases visibility. Similarly, the women pointed out that blogs were especially good for bringing visibility to young adults as blogs have become a main medium they use. Susan said,

It’s where the younger generation gets their news, period. So what’s written there is going to be seen as much more mainstream — it’s going to inform them about what the movement does. So in that sense, it’s truly on the front edge of the image of feminism.

The bloggers explained that people could easily discover or learn more about feminism on blogs even if they were not looking for it. That is, because many bloggers
write about popular culture events, it is easy for bloggers to tie feminist lenses or critique in their posts. As Jamie said,

You know, most of us follow a lot of pop culture trends and things like that so I think [pop culture blogs are] where we’re seeing more visibility to a younger audiences of these issues — these ideas that people are talking about.

Emily said,

In terms of Tumblrs out there, I think that also helps young women — or young people, not just women — young people discover what feminism means in an academic sense and what it might mean to them.

Some of the participants measured visibility by the amount of discourse they were engaged in or the discourse they observed taking place on other blogs, however, a few of the women had experienced it. These bloggers described how they either knew nothing or little of feminism until they began to read and write blogs. In other words, blogs educated them about feminism as well as presented the chance to engage in conversations about feminism. Emily said, “And I guess my views of feminism have kind of deepened since blogging…” She continued to describe how she did not know much about feminism because she “did not train as a feminist” (i.e. major in women’s studies or gender studies), but once she began blogging, she started to learn definitions and terms used in discourses about feminism. For Emily, a journalist primarily concerned with working women’s issues, blogs helped connect her with intersectional feminism which she now frequently writes on. Hannah expressed a similar sentiment saying blogging changed her views about feminism, “radically” and that, “Hearing those stories and hearing that from people’s perspectives, really changed how I thought about feminism and actually made
me not write as much.” The reason she did not want to write as much through her own blog was because she felt she was learning so much about the dialogue surrounding feminism through reading other blogs, namely women of color blogs. Jaime, who was familiar with feminism from academic study, said, “[Blogging has] made me more aware of those discussions and the use of language that happens when we are talking about feminism or feminist practice or feminist figures and things like that.” She then used that knowledge to generate more discussions around feminism through her blog as well as transfer that knowledge to her work at a nonprofit specialized in raising girls’ self-esteem.

While all of the women discussed feminism in their blogs, some chose to create discussions on feminism while rarely using the word “feminism.” They explained that omitting “feminism” was a specific tactic used to drive people to their blogs where they would then read discussions about feminism. So whether these readers were seeking out a feminist perspective or not, they could still be exposed to it and engage in the discussion. Karen said, “Whatever the issue is, I kind of do it through humor and some subtlety and so I am in fact exposing a lot more people who might not realize that’s what they’re coming there for.” It was their hope, that once exposed to feminist ideas, readers would begin to think about feminism and seek out more information (on their blog or others) on it.

Of course, increased visibility of feminism does not always result in positive feelings toward feminism. Though Susan stated that blogging did not change her views on feminism, she did say, “But now I have more specific ideas about precisely what’s
wrong.” She described how blogging helped her better understand discussions around feminism and that these discussions helped her locate the issues she has with feminism.

**Contemporary Feminism**

In articulating their views on contemporary feminism and second-wave feminism, two major themes emerged from the interviews: (a) there is a lack of solidarity in the contemporary movement, but (b) they are optimistic about the future of the movement.

**Lack of Feminist Solidarity**

While discussing second-wave and contemporary feminism, it became apparent that the participants felt the contemporary movement lacked the solidarity felt during the second-wave. Though they felt blogs were bringing visibility to feminism, helping build feminist communities, and facilitating important feminist discourse, blogs were not necessarily fostering a sense of shared feminist purpose. Angela said, “You know, I look at feminism right now and rather than it being everyone on the same boat rowing forward, I feel like we’re kind of in a round boat that’s circulating as a train.”

This lack of solidarity was caused partially from uncertainty about the current state and direction of the contemporary movement. The participants stated that though there was disagreement in the second-wave, there was a definiteness and a sense of shared purpose which strengthened the movement. In Jaime’s words, “My sense is that second-wave was maybe a little more — there was a little more decisiveness and a little
more obvious decisiveness in the movement.” Today, however, they did not feel that mainly because they were fragmented and confused. Hannah said, “Well, it’s interesting because I guess, I’m not really sure if we’re still in the third wave or if we’re in the fourth wave or if we don’t want waves anymore because waves are for textbooks.” Jaime echoed this statement, “I think that we are a little uncomfortable with thinking that we’re in a third or fourth or sixth wave or something like that, because the sort of really hard won equalities won in a sense, you know?” Finally, Emily said, “Like, I’m not really sure who’s big in activism or feminism who haven’t already been showcased on Time magazine.”

This lack of solidarity was one of the main issues Susan took with contemporary feminism. She said, “And one of the main things is even feminist women who will claim the title, they can’t even agree on what feminism means.” She thought this translated into the blogosphere where, “…basically you’ve got a hundred voices speaking in a room and everyone’s saying something slightly different.” Though she agreed that blogs were bringing visibility to feminism, they were also only exacerbating fragmentation within the movement.

Other participants expressed similar views. They explained that while blogs help to bring more voices to the conversations about feminism, blogs also make it more difficult to have a shared sense of purpose. What undermined solidarity was the idea of consensus. The participants felt as though they were constantly in debate without reaching conclusions or solutions. Emily summed her feelings by saying, “But due to the internet, it’s impossible to rally around one feminist issue.” This finding is complicated
by what the participants expressed in the next section, which is an optimistic view towards future feminism.

**Optimistic in Future Feminism**

Despite the lack of solidarity, the participants held great hope in the future of the contemporary movement. They were unsure of which specific direction the movement would take or which feminist victories were on the horizon, but they felt that feminism could only continue to improve, with blogs playing their own part to support this.

Though blogs played their role in complicating solidarity, the women felt that the benefits to blogging would ultimately help the movement. Again, they felt blogs were a great communication tools to facilitate conversations about feminism, bring visibility to feminism, and help build communities in which conversations about feminism can occur. Given the relative accessibility of blogs, the participants felt more voices, opinions, and perspectives could be included in discussions about feminism, which would ultimately help improve the movement. Jamie said, “The more voices we have talking about feminism in productive ways, I think it helps the way people come to understand as what feminism can be.”

The women also pointed out that as a medium becomes more popular, it becomes more cemented into our life. And if there is a large discussion around feminism through blogs, people will be able to engage it, even if they stumble upon by chance. With that, people will begin to adopt the medium at younger and younger ages and can be introduced to these discussions earlier in life. Hannah said,
So [blogs are] definitely gonna make people start to think about a lot of issues, maybe even before they’re ready to. And that’s a good thing because it’ll challenge belief[s] that people currently have maybe even more those beliefs get started.

**Conclusion**

The goal of this chapter was to discover how people use blogs as a forum to discuss, debate, and circulate feminism. Through interviewing six different bloggers about their feelings towards blogs and feminism, five common themes were found: blogs were an excellent communication tool for (a) facilitating feminist conversations, (b) building feminist communities, and (c) bringing visibility to feminism, and the contemporary feminist movement (d) lacked solidarity, but (e) the participants are optimistic about the future of the movement.

RQ3 asks why people chose blogs as the channel to express their views on feminism. The interviews revealed that the participants use blogs because they present numerous benefits to producing, circulating, and engaging with discussions on feminism. First, blogs are fundamentally designed to relate personal information in a social manner. Generally public, blogs allow people to share their own thoughts, feelings, ideas, experiences, and stories in a social way (i.e. others can view and even comment on their posts). Discussion can happen within the body of the original blog (e.g. the comment’s section) or can occur outside of the blog (e.g. email). Additionally, blogs are relatively accessible so it is possible to include a wide range of voices within this discussion. For
these reasons, blogs naturally serve to prompt a dialogue. Parried with the emphasis on story-telling, the participants felt blogs served as a great communication tool for discussing, debating, circulating, and promoting feminism.

Born from the function of conversation facilitating, blogs could also help build online communities. Those without a physical community in which they could discuss feminism could easily go online and carve out a space for themselves through blogs to construct a community. Similarly, those without physical communities could also simply join existing communities through blogging. Again, as the purpose of a blog is to facilitate conversations, communities form from discussions around feminism. Then, by connecting with these communities, people could become more involved in the contemporary feminist movement. It is clear from their own words that the bloggers were echoing the same feelings felt during the second-wave. Specifically, blogs serve as a support-network for feminists and the use of support-networks were critical in organizing second-wave feminist activism. Like the feminist of the second-wave did physically, bloggers may virtually organize and strengthen ties to different branches of feminism.

Finally, a major benefit to blogging about feminism was that it brought visibility to feminism. This is due to the fact blogs are rising in popularity so there are more people who are reading and writing blogs. With the use of keywords, bloggers who discuss feminism can promote their blogs, which can bring more people to the discussion. Also by choosing to write on popular culture events, bloggers are able to expose readers to feminism, even if they were not expecting to find it. This way, blogs can be used to teach people about feminism and even invite them into the discussion when those people might not encountered it otherwise. Similarly, many of the women had learned about or
developed a deeper understanding of feminism through blogging. The way in which these bloggers used blogs is comparable to Friedan’s writings. Both employed narratives and used pop culture to relate complex and abstract issues like feminism to everyday occurrences.

However, these benefits are not outweighed by one of the largest challenges the participants saw facing the contemporary movement — a lack of solidarity. RQ2 is answered here. Despite the conversation facilitating, community building, and visibility generating done by blogs, they are not currently improving feminists shared sense of purpose. In a sense, blogs made it more difficult reach solidarity because of its very benefits — instant communication. The entire digital realm acts as an obstacle to reaching consensus (something the participants felt essential to solidarity). They felt this lack of solidarity was a distinct difference from second-wave feminism. Yet, paradoxically, the silver lining expressed was the eventually blogs were be able to unite feminists and solidarity would be realized. So even though blogging is currently fragmenting the movement, ultimately it would cease doing so and help unite feminists. This feeling of optimism can be traced back to cyberfeminist views toward early internet technology. The focus is on what blogs can do as opposed to what blogs are doing. This explains why despite not seeing results of a unified contemporary movement, the participants felt blogs would eventually aid in reaching solidarity. Coupled with positives experiences and the visibility blogs are bringing to feminism, it is not too difficult to see why the participants feel this way. Blogs, then, are not merely a means for communication, community-building, or visibility generating, but are sites of inspiration and projections of hope.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to discover why and how bloggers are using blogs as a forum to discuss, debate, circulate, and promote feminism. Specifically, I sought to understand how bloggers understood contemporary feminism, how they articulated the differences and similarities between second-wave and contemporary feminism, and why bloggers chose blogs as the channel to express their views on feminism. I accomplished this by using mixed-methods — semi-constructed interviews with bloggers and thematic textual analysis of their blog posts. The thematic textual analysis provided me the ability to critically analyze the bloggers post on the 50th anniversary of The Feminine Mystique. The interviews allowed me to directly speak with the bloggers, gathering their thoughts in their own words. This also aided in complimenting, expanding, and complicating the findings from the textual analysis.

Discussion

Analysis of from both the textual analysis and interviewers conducted with the six participants revealed five themes about their thoughts on using blogs to create discussion about feminism as well as their views on second-wave and contemporary feminism. While discussing blogs, all of the participants expressed that blogs were an excellent
communication tool for (a) facilitating conversations about feminism, (b) building communities, and (c) bringing visibility to feminism. When discussing feminism, the participants' feelings towards the contemporary movement were that (a) there is a lack of solidarity in the contemporary movement, but (b) they are optimistic about the future of the movement.

The first three points about blogging are direct answers to RQ1 (how have bloggers used their blogs as a forum to create discussions about feminism?) and RQ3 (why have bloggers chosen blogs as the channel to express their views on feminism?) One of the strongest sentiments communicated during the interviews as to why they chose blogs was that blogs are great tools in producing, circulating, and engaging with discussions on feminism. The participants felt blogging provided them with a platform to share information and engage in discourse easily and effectively because of the interactive and social nature of blogging. In short, blogs made excellent hosts because of its emphasis on two-way communication. In terms of its use in facilitating discussions about feminism, how they used blogs was through personal story-telling and participatory communication.

Blogs were also praised for their ability to build and strengthen communities. The analysis of their blog posts showed bloggers gave emphasis to community — particularly collective responsibility for and action towards improving working women’s issues. During the interviews, this sentiment was supported with the participants describing how blogs were able to connect communities together or enable people who create new ones. However, one of the participants noted that membership into these communities is limited to those with the identity of “feminist.”
Finally, blogs were stated to be a platform for generating visibility about feminism. Often blogs and blog posts framed discussions around feminism through analysis of popular culture events. The women explained that many young adults search for blog posts which cover such events and are able to become exposed to feminism. Some of the participants had experienced this, stating that their own views about feminism have changed or deepened since they began reading and writing blogs.

RQ2 asked, “How do bloggers articulate the differences and similarities between second-wave and contemporary feminism?” First, bloggers understood contemporary feminism as being inclusive of diverse races, classes, sexualities, genders, and backgrounds. This was found in their blog posts as well as stated during their interviews. This welcoming of women who were not white, middle-class was dually seen to be a marked difference from second-wave feminism and the message found in *The Feminine Mystique*. However, it is important to note that though this is how the women felt, their blog posts still mainly addressed middle-class, white women’s issues. So despite their belief this is a difference between the movements, they also simultaneously demonstrated a similarity to Freidan in focusing mainly on white, middle-class women.

Another difference between second-wave and contemporary feminism was the belief that today’s movement lacks the solidarity felt in the previous movement. The participants explained that they felt there was more certainty, more decisiveness, and a stronger sense of shared purpose during the second-wave. They felt that blogs (and the internet generally) were currently exacerbating this issue, however, they held hope in blogs ability to eventually unite feminists together. This feeling is tied to previous feminist scholarship, including cyberfeminist, in which the stock is placed in *ability*
rather than reality. However, the similarity between the two waves was the emphasis on locating collective and systematic solutions to feminist issues. Second-wave feminism is known for promoting and implementing such solutions, making the bloggers ideas about change a clear similarity.

Given these results, the bloggers who wrote posts about The Feminine Mystique’s 50th anniversary shared much in common with Betty Friedan, and in essence, were using their blogs like she used her famous text. First, like Friedan, all of the participants were educated (having earned at least bachelor degrees), were professionally trained, and had experience with activism or radicalism. And like Friedan, most of the bloggers were journalists who trained in either journalism or writing. Similarly, these women tended not to publicize their journalistic expertise as Friedan had done in The Feminine Mystique. And while the content of the participants blogs were different from the content found in The Feminine Mystique, the bloggers had chosen blogs for their use in getting their messages out, building communities, and generating visibility. Friedan had chosen books as her medium since books were likely to be read by a large audience, and thus gathering visibility for her ideas, in the 1960s. Today, bloggers chose blogs to discuss feminism in order to connect with and unite communities together and gather visibility for their ideas about feminism. Friedan and bloggers also share similar writing styles: the use of narrative and popular culture to explain complex, abstract ideas in simple and relatable terms. As such, the spirit of Friedan’s publishing of The Feminine Mystique is the same as the spirit of the bloggers who published blog posts about the text fifty years later. So though they may not have been intentional in mimicking Freidan with their blog posts on her famous text, they essentially acted like her: a blogging Betty.
This study aimed to provide a sense of how blogs are currently being used to discuss, debate, circulate, and promote feminism, but they also provide implications in how feminists can use blogging as an online space for creating solidarity within the contemporary movement. It is evident from the findings that blogs possess this duality between fostering and undermining solidarity and thus, feminist need to understand how we can use this space to further feminist aims. This is especially significant when considering that many of the participants (and myself) formed or deepened their views about feminism through interaction with blogs. Like the participants, I too have no idea which specific direction the movement will take nor can I provide one, easy solution here. But one possible answer is to use blogs to continue to amplify the experiences of women. Blogs may also continue to be the site of feminist activism through their use in disrupting dominant discourses, providing critical analysis, raising awareness, building and strengthening communities of women, circulating information, and organizing.

These findings also suggest that feminists, especially feminists in academia, need to continue to examine blogs in relation to their use in creating safe spaces. This topic is of particular importance in the wake of Gamergate. An online harassment campaign started in August 2014 which continues today, Gamergate has made apparent the very real and serious risks women face from using blogs to discuss feminist ideas. After publishing blog posts which criticize the video game industry via feminist lens (has Anita Sarkeesian and Brianna Wu have) or even posts that simply express fear over this misogynic movement (has Felicia Day did), numerous women have received death and rape threats as well as had their personal information made public. In response to this,
feminists have taken to the internet to organize and support safe spaces where women can continue to disrupt dominant discourses without fear of violent retaliation.

One such example is Zoe Quinn, the first target of the Gamergate, launching Crash Override in January 2015. Crash Override is a website for victims of online harassment. The site both offers a private and safe space for victims to gather and exchange experiences and a resource guide which prepares victims to handle various online and real life harassment situations. Though only a few months old, those affected by Gamergate have praised Crash Override for offering a secure support network (Hudson, 2015).

Thus, scholars need to continue to study blogs and investigate their use as a tool for communicating about feminism. In doing so, not only will we expand upon our understanding blogging, but we will also learn more about feminist uses for blogging, including activist aims. This study has attempted to take a step towards understanding this use.

Limitations & Future Research

Of course, this study is not without limitations. The catalyst for this study — blog posts about the 50th anniversary of The Feminine Mystique — also poses a limitation. Professional bloggers (those who are paid in some form for their blog work) generated many of the blog posts about the event and, thus, the participants were all professional bloggers. If a different feminist event was chosen, it is possible a different group of bloggers would have been selected for participation who might have provided different
insights. Similarly, I noticed that many famous bloggers of color did not blog about the event so this provides further reason to examine another feminist event.

Future researchers should seek to include a larger number of participants as well as include participants from different races, classes, sexualities, and genders. The majority of this study’s participants were heterosexual, middle-class, educated, white women. As such, in both the blog posts and interviews, mainly issues affecting women of this demographic were discussed. Future researchers might want to include a larger data set comprised of non-heterosexual, middle-class, white women as it may produce different findings as well as expand upon and complicate ideas expressed here. Similarly, future researchers should seek to include feminists, non-feminists, and even anti-feminists. Surely this would lead to intricate and fascinating notions about using blogs to discuss feminism.

Future researchers might also consider conducting a longitudinal study. This would allow for examination of multiple blog posts over a long period of time, leading to a deeper analysis of how bloggers frame discussions about feminism. This could also be done with the purpose of tracking reactions to large-scale popular culture events through blogs in the context of dialogues around feminism. For example, the online reaction towards the 50th anniversary of *The Feminine Mystique* was noticeably different from the online reaction to Beyonce’s VMA performance in which she was silhouetted by the word “feminist.” This would provide nuance to scholarship about feminist blogging.
References


Appendix

Interview Guide

Biography and Preliminary Questions:

What is your age?

What is your ethnicity?

Please tell me about your career background.

How did you first learn about feminism?

What does feminism mean to you?

What issues do you consider to be feminist? Why?

Feminism and Blogging:

Have your views of feminism changed since you began blogging and/or reading blogs?

How so?

In what ways do you think blogging does/will influence young adults understanding of feminism, if at all?

Do you find there are more blogs in support of feminism or in opposition to feminism?

Why do you think that is?

Do you think blogging is an effective means of communicating feminism?

Do you think blogging has made feminism more visible to young adults?

When did you decide to start expressing your views on feminism through your blog?

Why did you chose to use a blog to do this as opposed to other media?

What are the benefits to expressing your views on feminism through a blog?
What obstacles have you encountered with expressing your views on feminism through a blog?

The Feminine Mystique:

Do you think the ideas presented in Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* are still relevant today? Why or why not?

How would you define the feminism presented in *The Feminine Mystique*?

How does this definition differ from contemporary feminism?

Why do you think those differences exist?

How is this definition similar to contemporary feminism?

Why do you think those similarities are still present?

Do you think Betty Friedan’s approach to communicating feminism is similar or different to today’s feminists approach? Why?

What do you think Betty Friedan’s impression of contemporary feminism would be?

Do you think Betty Friedan would have blogged if the technology was available during her time? What would her blog look like?

Do you think young adults have the same concerns about feminism as previous generations? Why or why not?