

## Why 'intergenerational feminist media studies'?

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### Abstract

Feminism and generation are live and ideologically freighted issues that are subject to a substantial amount of media engagement. The figure of the millennial and the babyboomer, for example, regularly circulate in mainstream media, often accompanied by hyperbolic and vitriolic discourses and affects of intergenerational feminist conflict. In addition theories of feminist generation and waves have been and continue to be extensively critiqued within feminist theory. Given the compelling criticisms directed at these categories, we ask: why bother examining and foregrounding issues of generation, intergeneration and transgeneration in feminist media studies? Whilst remaining skeptical of linearity and familial metaphors and of repeating reductive, heteronormative and racist versions of feminist movements, we believe that the concept of generation does have critical purchase for feminist media scholars. Indeed, precisely because of the problematic ways that it is used, and the prevalence of it as a volatile, yet only too palpable, organizing category, generation is both in need of continual critical analysis, and is an important tool to be used -- with care and nuance -- when examining the multiple routes through which power functions in order to marginalize, reward and oppress. Exploring both diachronic and synchronic understandings of generation, this article emphasizes the use of conjunctural analysis to excavate the specific historical conditions that impact upon and create generation.

This special issue of *Feminist Media Studies* covers a range of media forms -- film, games, digital media, television, print media, as well as practices of media production, intervention and representation. The articles also explore how figures at particular lifestages -- particularly the girl and the aging woman -- are constructed relationally, and circulate, within media, with particular attention to sexuality. Throughout the issue there is an emphasis on exploring the ways in which the category of generation is mobilised in order to gloss sexism, racism, ageism, class oppression and the effects of neoliberalism.

Keywords: feminism \* generation \* intergenerational \* media studies \*

### **Mediating feminist generations**

In January 2016 an opinion piece in the UK tabloid newspaper the *Daily Mail* argued that “with the benefit of hindsight” feminists in the 1960s and 1970s “had a point about unthinking sexism” (Thompson 2016). However, this reluctant retroactive validation was mobilized to position such “old-style feminists” against a crazy “new generation” whose research into sexualities and the fluidity of gender identity is framed as “loopy feminist drivel.” Honing in on scholarship being undertaken in schools in relation to gender identity, the article harnessed a language of moral panic about at-risk children who are being “fed a dangerous fiction” by debating gender; and the research team it critiqued is later conflated with “pampered young people”. Mobilising affects of hate -- including the editorial decision to use an image from *Little Britain*, thus belittling transpeople -- the article works to discredit and disparage scholars who use feminist methodologies and who advocate for a queer politics. What is significant here is the way that the author and the newspaper draw generational lines between ‘old’ and ‘young’ and assign ideological freight to them according to the convenience and logic of a reactionary argument.

Generation is often used as part of the neoliberal discourse that justifies so-called austerity. As a category it can simultaneously work to erase the voices of ‘the millennials’ while blaming their lack of agency on ‘the baby boomers’ (Gullette 2004). For example, in the UK the overdetermined figure of the privileged baby boomer who benefited from a free higher education, owns their own house, funds their holidays through a prodigious pension, and who will destroy the national health service (NHS) by refusing to die, functions to deflect attention away from the government’s ideologically-driven cuts to the public sector. Such narratives can be found in ostensibly left-wing broadsheets like *The Guardian* as well as relentlessly right-wing tabloids like the *Daily Mail* (Arnett, Barr and Malik 2016). In the *Daily Mail* article the millennial generation is represented by the figure of the so-called no-platforming student, whose politics is an “ultimate pointless luxury”; the student is compared to “Senator Joseph McCarthy hunting out Communists in 1950s America”. Such connotations,

untethered to specific examples, can, as Sara Ahmed (2016) argues, function to silence the complexities of existing debate on gender and sexual politics.

The *Daily Mail* article repeats postfeminist narratives about feminism by locating it in the past (Thompson 2016). To use Angela McRobbie's formulation, it both takes feminism "into account" and then rejects it as no longer applicable (McRobbie 2009). The article homogenises the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s by representing it as focused on the single issue of equal rights in the workplace. Unusually, it depicts 1970s feminism as authentic: after all, back then, "male employers judged [women] by their looks or the size of their 'knockers'". But it does so in order to construct queer feminist approaches as completely new, different, and pathological. Notwithstanding the assumption that sexism is now over, it is an ahistorical and reductive portrayal of the feminist movement which is used in order to pit feminists against each other on a generational basis.

Feminism and generation are live and ideologically freighted issues around which there is a sizeable amount of media engagement. One of the most common tropes is that of the feminist movement as marred by 'catfights.' In her support of Hilary Clinton in the 2016 U.S. presidential candidacy, former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said, "We can tell our story of how we climbed the ladder, and a lot of you younger women think it's done. It's not done. There's a special place in hell for women who don't help each other!" (Wilson 2016). Allegiance to a narrowly conceptualized liberal feminism was conflated by Albright with allegiance to *all* feminisms. As part of the same political campaign, on the television show *Real Time with Bill Maher* (HBO 2016), Gloria Steinem suggested that younger women were backing Bernie Sanders as Democratic candidate simply so they could meet young men (Wilson 2016). Disparaging the political choice of a younger generation and failing to recognize that many young (and older) women are choosing not to vote for Clinton because they recognize how neoliberal structures oppress and limit women, Steinem similarly managed to conflate liberal feminism with all feminism whilst insulting the intelligence of young women.

While Steinem later retracted this statement on Facebook -- a platform used by many young feminists -- both her and Albright's comments were made subject to gleeful media amplification: feminists are at each other again -- hurray! The ages of the women discussed in the media coverage of these incidents were repeatedly highlighted in order to question the

credibility of the speakers; its grammar amenable to ageist discourses, cutting both ways, pitting prejudices of young against old, old against young. In the process, both the statements and the media commentary strengthened postfeminist discourse, functioning to repeat the story that the primary divisions in feminism are always, without fail, about *generation*, rather than questions of, say, race or politics; and that women of different generations are natural enemies.

### **Critiquing generational approaches**

There are many ways and reasons why a generational approach to understanding feminism, gender and media might be reductive. Take the ‘wave’ metaphor of feminism, for instance, with its implication of large, if uneven, generational shifts. It is regularly invoked to herald a ‘new’ kind of feminism that has broken with the old. Yet, the ‘waves’ paradigm has been critiqued because it erases diversity, difference and connections in the feminist movement and circumscribes the way in which feminist work can be understood (Dicker and Piepmeier 2003). The Palgrave book series ‘Breaking feminist waves’ seeks feminist theorizing that is committed to breaking free from the constraints of the image of waves (Howie 2010). Critics such as Kathleen A. Laughlin *et al.* (2010) have suggested other more productive metaphors, such the river. These metaphors allow for continuity, as well as difference, within feminist movements, in addition to foregrounding the multiplicity of local streams or grassroots struggles. Kimberley Springer argues that young Black women do not necessarily claim the “wave” label because they “share their life stories in the public forum as a way of asserting a contemporary Black female identity that is mindful of historical context and community imperatives.” For Black feminists, she argues, generational difference is deprioritized “in the interest of historical, activist continuity”; a continuity that is essential for the “recuperation of the self in a racist and sexist society” (Springer, 2002, 1060-1061).

In addition, even though the ‘fourth wave’ has gained media traction (Dean, 2012; Cochrane, 2015) many feminists themselves do not feel that the term characterizes their feminist identity. For example, Jessalynn Keller (2015) describes how many of her teenage feminist interviewees rejected the label of ‘fourth wave.’ Moreover, while these teens simultaneously saw themselves as *different* from so-called second-wave feminists, primarily through being ‘networked’ via digital technologies, they also articulated clear *connections* to older feminist generations through a shared commitment to ongoing feminist struggles, including reproductive rights and gendered violence.

Recent scholarship -- including a special issue of *Australian Feminist Studies* (2009) edited by Rosi Braidotti and Claire Colebrook -- has echoed many of these concerns with a generational approach to feminism. Jennifer Purvis (2004) warns against reifying oppositions between different generations of feminisms because they are inevitably based on caricatures. Finn McKay (2015) argues that as women of different ages identify with radical feminism, conflicts between feminists should be discussed in terms of political differences rather than generational ones. In this issue of *Feminist Media Studies*, Rosalind Gill makes the argument that political allegiances are of more salient significance than the issue of intergeneration; and Alison Harvey and Stephanie Fisher argue that generation is of less import than politics and intersectionality in the digital games industry.

Kinship metaphors and metonyms saturating much mediated reference to generation are also highly contentious (Taylor 2004). In particular, deploying a 'mother-daughter' metaphor for feminism has been critiqued in debates around feminist theory. In an online argument between journalist Susan Faludi and queer theorist Jack Halberstam, for example, Halberstam criticized Faludi for casting feminist conflict "in the mother-daughter bond," arguing that its positioning as "transhistorical, transcultural, universal" ignored "the instability of gender norms, the precarious condition of the family itself" as well as "the many challenges made to generational logics within a recent wave of queer theory on temporality" (Halberstam 2010). Similarly, the insistence on couching all futures in terms of a heteronormative maternal has now been critiqued by a number of feminist and queer theorists (Badinter 2012; Edelman 2004; Maier 2009; Power 2012; McBean 2015).

### **Using generation in feminist media studies**

Given these compelling critiques of generation, we may ask: why bother with considering generation within feminist media studies? We too are skeptical of linearity and familial metaphors. We are wary of repeating reductive, heteronormative and racist versions of the feminist movement. As Clare Hemmings argues, the stories that are told about feminism (whether they are narratives of progress, loss or return) "sustain one version of history as more true than another, despite the fact that we know that history is more complicated than the stories we tell about it" (Hemmings 2011, 15-16). Indeed, she argues that "feminist theorists need to pay attention to the amenability of our own stories, narrative constructs, and grammatical forms to discursive uses of gender and feminism we might otherwise wish to

disentangle ourselves from if history is not simply to repeat itself” (Hemmings 2011, 2). The *Daily Mail* article above is but one example of these problematic discursive uses of feminism.

It is true that often generation becomes over-emphasised in defining unsurmountable differences between feminists, when in fact the key differences are based on other intersecting forms of oppression (Henry 2004). Moreover, we need to be mindful of the various ways generation has been used for marketing purposes. After all, in 1997, Pepsi enlisted the Spice Girls for a new wave of ‘Generation Next’ commercials in attempt to corner the millennial demographic whilst drawing on signifiers of 1990s’ ‘girl power’ feminism. The perpetual fashion cycles of capitalism continually tell us to focus on the new, even if it’s the new old.

Nevertheless, despite these important issues, we believe that the concept of generation does have critical purchase for feminist media scholars. Indeed, precisely because of the problematic ways that is it used, and the prevalence of it as a volatile, yet only too palpable organizing category, generation is both in need of continual critical analysis, and is an important tool to be used -- with care and nuance -- when examining the multiple routes through which power functions in order to marginalize, reward and oppress. We hope that this special issue will extend this process.

There are several different ways to understand generation. One basic schema is to split it into two types: firstly, the familial and ‘diachronic’ between, for example, grandparent, parent and child; and second, the ‘synchronic’: between peers who are born at a similar time. Below we discuss how a conjunctural analysis can provide useful explanations of the character of a particular ‘synchronic’ generational formation (why ‘millennial’ or ‘babyboomer’ feminists engage in specific activist strategies, for example). However, we also need nuanced models that can help us interpret the diachronic dimension: the inter- in ‘intergeneration’, as well as the trans- in transgeneration: being between and across generations. As we showed earlier, this is a problematic zone. We therefore argue for a non-essentialist version of generation, one open to excavating the conditions of its own existence, its own psychosocial constructions. Metaphors of generation are often loaded; they come with the baggage of their enunciator, are shaped within specific cultural domains and discourses. Yet generation is an issue that affects us all; we are all born from a different generation, and even if we do not reproduce another in the singular sense of ‘having children,’ we are part of a wider tapestry

of social reproduction. ‘Lifecycles’ are culturally specific, but important in, despite and through their range and diversity. How generation is conceptualized at a particular point in time to a large degree depends on the contexts of which it is a part.

### **A conjunctural analysis of generation**

Generation, used with nuance, is important because it helps to make sense of differences incurred by specific historical conditions, and which contribute to the formation of feminist and gendered sensibilities and their mediation. The multiple forms of oppression that feminists might be working against include those constituted by the particular circumstances of their historical moment. For example, the concerns of the U.S.-based black feminist blog *Crunk Feminist Collective* can be read as generational:

We are members of the Hip Hop Generation because we came of age in one of the decades, the 1990s, that can be considered post-Soul and post-Civil Rights. Our political realities have been profoundly shaped by a systematic rollback of the gains of the Civil Rights era with regard to affirmative action policies, reproductive justice policies, the massive deindustrialization of urban areas, the rise and ravages of the drug economy within urban, semi-urban, and rural communities of color, and the full-scale assault on women’s lives through the AIDS epidemic. We have come of age in the era that has witnessed a past-in-present assault on our identities as women of color, one that harkens back to earlier assaults on our virtue and value during enslavement and imperialism (*Crunk Feminist Collective*, Manifesto, 2010).

*Crunk Feminist Collective* define themselves as different from previous generations of feminists of colour not antagonistically, or to proclaim a new wave, but in order to locate their political concerns as specific to the white supremacist “past-in-present” where legislative and socioeconomic policies have accelerated to impact disproportionately and deny social justice to women of colour. In addition, the *Collective* construct their feminist network in relation to hip hop, a temporally-located cultural form, highlighting their differences from other feminist groups while forging global links with communities outside of the U.S. In this context, generation can be useful as a corrective to the restrictive power dynamics represented in the story of feminist ‘waves’, while still paying attention to changing historical conditions in which socio-economic contexts inform lived realities.

This example points to the ways in which the concept of generation can be fruitfully harnessed in relation to that term beloved of cultural studies, ‘the conjuncture’ (Gramsci 2005; Grossberg 2010; Hall 1980; Hall 1987; Littler 2016). In the 1970s cultural studies adopted the term used by Antonio Gramsci to refer to the power dynamics, the character, the balance of social, political and cultural forces at a given time that gave a particular moment its shape. The conjuncture is then a space of struggle, the space where established forces defend themselves and opposition forces struggle. When the power dynamics shift dramatically -- when social, political, economic and ideological contradictions at work in society, which have given it a specific and distinctive shape, move and create a crisis -- the conjuncture shifts. For example, the postwar settlement can be understood as one conjuncture and the neoliberal market-forces era unleashed by Thatcher and Reagan another; the movement between the two is not evolutionary, but driven and revealed through crisis, a crisis “brutally ‘resolved’” by neoliberal globalization (Hall, Massey and Rustin 2015).

Thinking about intergenerational feminisms in terms of the particularities of a given conjuncture is productive for a number of reasons. Because a conjunctural analysis involves looking at specific historical conditions, it can expose how power structures intersect with privilege and exclude particular groups. It can explain how racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism or class oppression can come together, be articulated together, in order to deny or create political identities; not just in society as whole but also in movements like feminism (Crenshaw 1991; 2015). The historical conditions of a conjuncture contribute to the formation of political subjectivity. Looking at generation through the frame of the conjuncture is therefore useful in unpacking and foregrounding differences resulting from being born into different historical periods. Understanding both the specificities and differences of different conjunctural moments is a productive way of framing feminism and generation. It has the potential to recognize and speak to feminist critiques of generation while still holding on to the term as not guaranteed, nonessential and politically strategic -- as a tool to analyse reactionary discourse; as a tool to make sense of the moment; and as a means to construct sustainable offline and online intergenerational feminist alliances.

Caricatures of the babyboomer, millennial, boy-crazed young feminist, no-platforming student, finger-wagging second-waver, all do significant work in personifying anxieties and contradictions about the specificities of the conjuncture. The affects such personifications harness and spread can be a means to alert us to the fact that politically, something is up.



Bringing to light the specific historical conditions that make up the present conjuncture helps make sense of the different ways that the effects of the 2008 crash intersect to impact disproportionately on people. Indeed, one of the reasons why the issue of generation has gained such traction in the mainstream media, and why generationally-inflected figures do so much ideological work, is because young people have been so strikingly targeted. The current neoliberal terrain where young people are forming their political consciousness is characterized by, among other things, market fundamentalism, a positioning of the individual as the primary social actor, precarious forms of employment, high levels of debt, environmental crisis and in many places the withdrawal of state support for education. People born in the 1980s onwards -- depending on their geography and socioeconomic status -- do not have the state safety net and access to education of many of those born before. Significantly, this diminution of resources is recurringly blamed on the caricature of the baby boomers who “Took Their Children’s Future” (Willets 2010). In this pervasive narrative, class issues are domesticated as familial, and government-driven cuts are framed as the fault of an older generation (Little 2014).

In order to disrupt these familial narratives, it is crucial that generation is understood in tandem with other vectors of oppression; it is always important to think of the constellation of which generation is a part. Millennials are not a homogeneous group, and their socioeconomic and cultural location is dependent on gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, religion, and place. For instance, working class young people in the UK experienced the devastating impact of neoliberal policies way before those protected by their middle class status (Roberts 2012; O’Hagan 2015). Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker (2014) make the case that, although the recession has been branded a ‘mancession’, it has disproportionately affected women. In their manifesto, the *Crunk Feminist Collective* articulate how the present neoliberal moment in the US is experienced differently by women of colour because the socioeconomic, cultural and legislative forms of white supremacist patriarchy intersect to impact disproportionately on them (Winch 2014).

Significantly, much of the recent extended coverage of millennial culture in the UK broadsheet *The Guardian* proved an example of how middle-class whiteness gets conflated with this generation. This reportage skewed the analysis of millennial culture and thus narrowed the potential for resistance to the increasing generational forms of impoverishment it identified (Guardian 2016; Malik and Barr 2016). It is also worth noting that when

generation starts and ends, and who gets to decide it, are contested and debatable, and subject to discursive definition: a domain where media plays a dominant role. In fact, a recent article in *The Atlantic* took up this analytical gauntlet ('The experts say the media get to determine when generations happen, and we're the media') to create a generational bar chart of baby boomers, generation X, Y, millennials and 'TBD' (Bump 2016). Yet these are very geographically situated categories, and

generational experiences are always situated both in time and space, and the different locations of these cohorts produces different understandings among individuals in a way that also produces differences in collectively shared experiences. (Bolin 2016, 13).

Women's experiences of 'Generation X' are very different in Birmingham from Bangalore. As Zizi Papachrissi has argued, the "business of labeling generations is somewhat US-centric, and produces labels that are more specific to the experience of growing up and living in the US" (Papachrissi 2015). Generations are culturally and geographically specific and provisional categories with ambiguous edges; a capacity in which they are not unique as analytical categories; the same could be said of culture or gender.

### **Conceiving of feminist generations: affective flashpoints**

As we have been showing, many of the debates about femininity, sexuality and generation are discussed, analyzed, and made sense of within media cultures. These debates are often affectively fraught, bound up as they are with discourses of betrayal, sex, the family, innocence and experience. For example, a 2013 feud between then twenty-year old pop star Miley Cyrus and forty-five year old Irish singer Sinead O'Connor played out on social media platforms and gained substantial commercial media coverage for several weeks. Framed by many commentators as a generational spat, the argument began with an open letter penned by O'Connor to Cyrus which warned the younger performer of falling victim to the music business who O'Connor claimed, will "prostitute you for all you are worth and cleverly make you think its what YOU wanted" (Smith 2013). Framing Cyrus as naïve and lacking agency over her sexuality, O'Connor positioned herself as an older, wiser role model who 'knows better' -- a position quickly rejected by Cyrus who responded by poking fun at O'Connor's mental health on Twitter. The singers' digital jabs played into conventional media narratives that warn about at-risk young women, espouse postfeminist issues of choice,

entrepreneurialism and agency, and pathologise older women. It was yet another example of generational conflict being amplified.

Generational disagreements between women which might be socially or culturally determined is often proclaimed in diachronic terms; between mother and daughter, for example, or between millennial and babyboomer. It also functions to reify gender as a stable category, harnessing essentialist ideas of who women are and what they are biologically wired to do. One of the effects of this is that political anger becomes reduced to a misogynist portrayal of female relationships as inevitably about competition; or it becomes domesticated and familial.

But how can we make sense of the charges made by O'Connor, Albright and Steinem against younger women, as well as the numerous other well-documented critiques of different older feminists by younger, newer 'waves' (e.g. Baumgardener and Richards 2000; Walker 2008)? Should we dismiss these antagonisms as complicit with an ageist and sexist mainstream media, which fetishizes youth at the same perpetuating moral panics about the sexualisation of girls, and which caricatures aging women as 'batty' and 'past it'? Representing and perpetuating intergenerational conflict is useful to deflect blame from those in power, as well as preventing effective political intergenerational alliances. For these reasons it is crucial to explore the affective flashpoints of these antagonisms in order to unpack what specificities and anxieties they might reveal about the present conjuncture.

Considering the relationships between women of different generations is a process Rosi Braidotti describes as alternating between generational envy and nostalgia:

If many of the younger feminists cannot help thinking that they were born too late and long for the political intensity of the 1960s and 1970s, the older ones wonder how they can find a place in the altered social landscapes of today, dominated as they are by neo-liberalism and perennial warfare. The envy factor is neither one-dimensional nor uni-directional: it spills all over the place (Braidotti 2009, 5).

Here Braidotti usefully questions linearity while simultaneously discussing the complex affects engendered by 'coming of age' in different conjunctures. Sianne Ngai's (2005) work on 'ugly feelings' is also constructive here. Ngai uses the film *Single White Female* (1992) to

delve into the productive possibilities of envy. She argues that is a constructive emotion if it is employed as a vehicle through which “to critically negotiate” certain models of femininity that we have been acculturated into admiring. In her words, a fruitful reflection on envy could “facilitate a transition from desire to antagonism that might enable me to articulate what I have been trained to admire as something threatening or harmful to me” (Ngai 2005, 163). Experiencing envy can be a signpost to inequality and injustice, and consequently offers “an ability to recognize and antagonistically respond to, potentially real and institutionalized forms of inequality” (Ngai 2005, 129).

Similarly, Lauren Berlant (2011) articulates how the anxious affect of “cruel optimism,” when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing, marks the contemporary neoliberal conjuncture. Framing Berlant’s ‘cruel optimism’ alongside the ‘ugly feelings’ discussed by Ngai can then be productive for unpacking generational antagonisms and tensions clustered within particular conjunctures and producing affect-laden discursive constructs, such as the spoiled and ungrateful young woman who is supposedly unaware of the sacrifices made by older generations of women. In this sense, generation carries an affective charge that produces flashpoints of not only anxiety and envy, but also regret, alienation, passion (and others) that often become mediated examples of how generations of women get along -- or not (Winch 2015).

Considering how creativity has been gendered in terms of generation, Lisa Tickner notes how a dominant strand of Western thought stages creativity and the transmission of ideas through a patriarchal, oedipal narrative where offspring fight to overthrow the regimes of their parents.<sup>1</sup> Feminists have looked for alternative Greek myths, finding one in the story of Demeter and Persephone, which is about women seeking attachment rather than men seeking separation such as in the Oedipus myth; where “the Freudian model of oedipal rivalry is replaced by an object-relations model of selfhood” (Tickner 2002, 26). But, Tickner argues that valuing this model of feminised filial reciprocity -- the good daughter -- is itself the product of a specific moment. Like other gender theorists of generation, she complicates the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity in relation to generation in favour of closer attention to the complexities of the psycho-social context and to exploding an understanding of familial dynamics beyond patriarchal psychoanalytic myths. She foregrounds what it might mean to understand the connection between generations outside the macho model of

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<sup>1</sup> She also notes how diachronic generation is often marked by a tree and synchronic generation by a map.

the overthrowing Great Male Genius battling his father, and “the right to inhabit, appropriate or ‘swerve’ from the example of fathers and brothers as well as mothers and aunts” (Tickner 2002, 30).

Together, the implications of these analyses are important for unpacking difference that is framed as generational when it might in fact be about something else. A conjunctural analysis, together with an exploration of affective flashpoints, can make sense of the ideologically-driven baby boomer and millennial caricatures that circulate in the mainstream media. And it can also work to unpack some of the intergenerational conflicts that puncture narratives about and within feminism. Such schemas offer a more expansive way of understanding how feminist legacies are bequeathed, taken up, rejected and negotiated by different generations, depending on both the particularity of the circumstance and the broader conjunctures of which they are a part.

Millennial identities have been produced as amenable to neoliberalism, and consequently, resistance to neoliberalism will be differently constructed when it has played such a key role in the formation of political subjectivity. Yet, many millennials have unprecedented access to digital technologies and information, and can become connected to and involved in political campaigns much easier than their parents. For example, millennial feminists have used digital media technologies as crucial tools for networking and consciousness-raising and have been able to access feminist stories and histories with speed and ease (Keller 2015). In this sense, the current conjuncture provides uneven terrain in which to practice politics. Likewise, those who have a ‘pre’-neoliberal political formation will use different understandings to challenge the oppressions and brutalities of the current conjuncture from those who are its historical ‘natives’. The task is to find ways to construct alliances across these periods of historical political formation whilst not romanticizing the notion of trouble-free space and recognizing that agonistic disagreement can be constructive and necessary (Mouffe 2005).

### **This anniversary issue**

The occasion of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Feminist Media Studies* is a timely moment to bring together an array of scholars at different stages in their academic career to consider the salience of generation in relation to the subjects the journal has been pathbreaking in analysing. The contributions range across the themes we have been discussing in this issue, dealing with questions of intergenerational rage, bickering and bonding, to look at the kind of

shared of shared conversations women have (or don't have) across age groups, and how these conversations circulate in media cultures in various global contexts. In our call for papers we sought articles that foregrounded how feminist media studies can contribute to an understanding of intergenerationality, and asked for papers that theorised: "Does an effective intergenerational feminist media studies exist, or do we need to invent or extend it?"

The field of feminist media studies has in recent years expanded its work on older generations through the interrogation of age and aging (Segal 2013; Douglas 2014) and younger generations through the growing sub-field of girls' studies (Kearney 2009). Several papers in this issue are concerned with youth and/or ageing. Deborah Jermyn's "Pretty Past It," which considers how older women are increasingly being positioned as credible fashion consumers and arbiters by the cultural industries. Discussing a range of examples, including the 'Advanced Style' blog, advertising campaigns for Marks and Spencer, Dolce and Gabbana and NARS cosmetics, and the Channel 4 documentary *Fabulous Fashionistas* -- all of which self-consciously deploy 'older' women as fashion icons -- Jermyn asks: what is at stake in the decision to co-opt 'old women' into the (young) marketplace of style and fashion? If on the one hand it marks an extension of the age through which women are permitted to have a positive fashionable and sexual identities, on the other it indicates how a coercion to submit to 'makeover' culture seemingly never ends.

Rosalind Gill also interrogates the category of postfeminism in the context of a seemingly "new" moment marked by a resurgence of interest in feminism in the media and among young women. Gill offers a defence of the continued importance of a critical notion of postfeminism, used as an analytical category to capture a distinctive contradictory-but-patterned sensibility intimately connected to neoliberalism. She argues for the importance of being able to "think together" the rise of popular feminism alongside and in tandem with intensified misogyny, and shows how a postfeminist sensibility informs even those media productions that ostensibly celebrate the new feminism.

Nithila Kanasagabai takes up Simidele Dosekun's understanding that postfeminism is a transnationally circulating culture. In her paper, she uses this understanding to interrogate how the categories of ageism, generation, postfeminism and sexism play out in the Indian television newsroom. Using interviews with female television journalists, she demonstrates how generational antagonism is partly a result of the way that neoliberal logics structure the

newsroom. She posits that the weakening of journalists' unions, the expansion of women workers in newsrooms and the evolution of a postfeminist narrative in journalism, are intrinsically interlinked. Older women seem to blame younger women for being complicit in both the neoliberalisation of the workplace and the commodification of the female body. Furthermore, in a postcolonial scenario in which ideals of respectability and tradition are mapped on the bodies of women, the taking up of postfeminist positions is further complicated. The article concludes by considering the newer assertions of dignity and modes of protest in this space.

In her analysis of the discursive construction of the suicide of Canadian teenager Amanda Todd, Renée Penney argues that the mediated adult-produced narratives which positioned Todd's act of flashing her breasts online as a "mistake" function to contain girls' sexuality and discredit their online behaviours as both naïve and dangerous. Penney's analysis usefully highlights the ways in which the intersection of girls' sexuality with their digital media practices has become an affective flashpoint for intergenerational politics, whereby anxieties over girls' mediated performance of sexuality has been problematically framed around generation, while masking the sexism, racism, and classism at the center of cases such as that of Amanda Todd.

Sexuality is also at the center of Leslie Paris' analysis of intergenerational online fandom around the *Twilight* series. Paris describes the ways in which *Twilight* has functioned as a bridge between generations, while simultaneously being used to shore up age-related distinctions, particularly in relation to sexuality. According to Paris then, the performance of an agential sexuality becomes coded as "adult" in many of the *Twilight* fanfiction websites, problematically excluding teenage fans from claiming a sexual identity. Yet, Paris also points to the ways in which female adult *Twilight* fans are often discursively and affectively constructed as "girlish" (Swindle 2011) -- excessive and overly emotional in their fandom -- acting out a sexuality deemed inappropriate for an adult. Paris' analysis suggests the ongoing need for feminist media scholars to not only unpack what we mean by generation and how its conceived within fan cultures, but also how it moves alongside normative constructions of both femininity, sexuality, and age.

Gina Marchetti adopts a similar approach in her article "Handover Women," exploring the ways in which the "intergenerational melodrama of infidelity" has been mobilized by

different generations of female filmmakers to interrogate changing gender norms in post-Handover Hong Kong. Marchetti's analysis reminds us that it is necessary to understand generation as located within particular geographic locations, while paying attention to not only the mediated representation of generations, but the ways in which these representations are shaped by the filmmaker and her own generational identification.

Media production is also the focus of Alison Harvey and Stephanie Fisher's paper, which examines moments of tension erupting around and between generations of game designers in Canada. It analyses two case studies of feminist game-making organizations that both identify as part of the FIG ('feminists in games' movement). These provide a rich source through which to analyse the nuanced nature of sexist practices in games, including the paternalistic nature of key male community figureheads 'who habitually offer female game makers unsolicited advice under the guise of care, a practice termed "dadding"'. Harvey and Fisher pick apart the tensions around feminist practice in games, discussing the problems of the politics of the 'hugbox' as well as those of call-out cultures, where "you win in debate but lose in community building", and arguing for the importance of intersectionality in politics in the formation of generation.

Eva Krainitzki's article "Older-Wiser-Lesbians" and "Baby-dykes": Mediating age and generation in New Queer Cinema questions how ageing and the generational are and have been mediated in new queer cinema. Examining a range of films --- *If These Walls Could Talk 2*, *Itty Bitty Titty Committee*, *The Owls*, *Hannah Free* and *Cloudburst* --- the article addresses diverse dramatisations of lesbian generations, interrogating to what extent alternative cinemas deconstruct normative conceptualisations of ageing. It argues that linear understandings of temporality and ageing contain the potential for New Queer Cinema to counteract such idealisations of youthfulness, which, it argues, is one of the most deep-rooted manifestations of heteronormativity.

In "Bridges, Ladders, Sparks & Glue" Dana Edell and Lyn Mikel Brown reflect on their experience working with girls between the ages of 13-22 years old as part of their involvement with SPARK, a 'girl-driven' U.S.-based antiracist gender justice organization. Edell and Brown advocate for a model of intergenerational 'girl-driven' activism that recognizes the ways in which girls and adults can work together to create progressive social change. Yet, drawing on interviews with SPARK participants, they also highlight the



difficulties in doing this within a neoliberal cultural climate that privileges narratives of individual girl success. These difficulties around issues of power, agency over work, and the politics of inclusivity often erupted in feelings of disappointed and frustration, as well as deep satisfaction and pleasure when campaigns ran smoothly. Edell and Brown's article then reminds us of both the opportunities and limitations of intergenerational media activism and points to the affective charge that generation carries in activist work.

'Intergenerational feminism and media' is the edited text of a roundtable held at City University London, UK organised by Alison Winch and Jo Littler and featuring Rosalind Gill, Hannah Hamad, Mariam Kauser, Diane Negra and Nayomi Roshini. Including recent graduates alongside feminist media scholars at various stages of their careers, the event generated lively discussion about the ways in which age and generation shape mediated conversations about feminist politics, what kind of shared conversations women have across age groups, and how intergenerational alliances can be built while still remaining sensitive to differences of experience.

In the very first issue of *Feminist Media Studies* Elspeth Probyn asked "Do we want to, or how do we, teach something that seems both impossibly wide and too narrow or specialized?" wondering "What is it exactly that we want our students to learn?" (Probyn 2001, 38). For Probyn, confronting the "commonsense assumptions that are also part of the messiness of gender" are crucial to the teaching of feminist media studies. Such confrontation, both made easier and more difficult by structural inequalities and pervasive media homophobia and racism, means that "the position of the feminist subject is still uncomfortable, both for teachers and their students" (Probyn 2001, 38). Probyn contextualized these questions within the changing funding structures of Australian universities. Significantly, 15 years on, the complexities of educational financing, managerial culture and increasing mechanisms of surveillance are crucial to thinking about the lived realities of teaching and researching feminist media studies (Gill 2009; McRobbie 2015; Johnston 2015). The position of the feminist subject is *still* "still uncomfortable". Whilst in 2016 feminist rhetoric and acceptable feminist figures circulate relatively frequently across media cultures, there are some kinds of feminisms and some feminist bodies that are more comfortable than others. And some kinds of methodologies and research questions that are more amenable to neoliberal patriarchy than others -- as indicated by the *Daily Mail* article above.

This issue argues for a feminist media studies which pays attention to the complexities of generation, the cultural political specificity of a conjuncture, the geographies and intersectionalities of media discourse and production. While it is impossible to provide a comprehensive analysis of generation in relation to feminist media studies, we hope that this issue contributes to and extends conversations about what generation can -- and cannot -- offer feminist media studies as a discipline. In doing so we recognize the need to continually interrogate how generation is employed within media cultures and to excavate how this relates to structures of power and privilege. In addition, we must extend our own analyses beyond Western borders and the whiteness and middle-classness that too often shapes how we conceive generations.

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