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Critical Blogging: Constructing Femmescapes Online

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Abstract: By looking at two queer femme blogs, this paper argues that online spaces can be used as sites of political resistance and arenas for developing queer identities and communities. This paper frames blogging as political activity by using prefigurative politics and the concepts "queerscapes" and "virtual boundary publics."

Introduction

A lot of it was just about what was going on in my personal life. I felt like I too was having trouble asserting myself so my needs could be met, stopping others from using and abusing me and finding myself in friendships where I held so much for the other person without reciprocation. I also started to feel like I spent a lot of time working to get folks more comfortable with me, my body and my ideas and focused on acceptance rather than mutual respect.

I don't want to be accepted, someone giving up the fight to make me thin, straight, and more docile….I wanted to be revered, leave people awestruck and that healthy dose of fear that forces people to think twice about the shit they say to me because of how I fearlessly defend and celebrate myself and others. (Luxery, 2014, February 2)

In the epigraph above, queer femme Tumblr blogger Jessica Luxery explains why she uses the hashtag #meanfatgirls to index her selfies. With this single hashtag Luxery asserts her right to an online and offline identity of her own choosing, in spite of pressures to conform to societal expectations of femininity, heterosexuality, and thinness. It is by analyzing online phenomena like hashtags that I argue that a blog on Tumblr.com, a site better known for selfies and gifs rather than written articles, is host to a range of politics, including those combating sexism, homophobia, and fatphobia.

In this paper, I draw on Gordon Brent Ingram's concept queerscapes, a network of queer spaces that enables queer survival (1997, p. 29), and prefigurative politics (van de Sande, 2013) to argue that femme blogs are an important aspect of *femmescapes,* a network of public spaces through which queer femininity is enacted, celebrated, and politicized. I examine two blogs, *Tangled Up In Lace,* curated by Jessica Luxery, and

That's So Majestic, curated by Fleetwood Legay, to argue that femmes politicize online space by using blogs as tools to engage in identity production, community building, and political theorizing. The online spaces examined here combat femmephobia and a host of other oppressions including racism, fatphobia, sexism and cissexism, class hierarchies and capitalism, and queer- and homophobia. I argue that *Tangled Up In Lace* and *That's So Majestic* are sites along a femmescape.

As a queer femme and Tumblr user, I came to *Tangled Up In Lace* and *That's So Majestic* organically. Though these blogs are but two of many femme blogs that make up an online femmescape, I focus on them because Luxery and Legay's relationship has captivated me for years. The two met on Tumblr, married, and together have many internet holdings, including YouTube channels, websites, and blogs hosted by Tumblr. Initially a fan of their blogs, I became a fan of their relationship, which was frequently documented online. The relationship was one site through which their politics were enacted, a site that seemed to foreground sex positive, queer, fat, femme4femme [1] desire, desire that is so rarely celebrated or even represented. Though Luxery and Legay are now separated, and though I have never interacted with either of them beyond likes and reblogs [2], the online legacy of their relationship still suggests the importance and power of femmes on Tumblr.

Tumblr allows users to post original content as photos, text, audio, and video, and to "reblog" or repost content originally posted by other users. Posts are archived and linked using hashtags. Users can interact directly with each other by "liking" or "replying" to posts, or by using the "ask" feature. These features lead Catherine Connell (2013) to argue that Tumblr offers collectively-produced narratives and a democratic form of public participation. Though online space is not inherently political, Luxery and Legay use it as a tool to resist the marginality of their intersecting identities: fat, femme, genderqueer, queer, and working-class.

Luxery's Tumblr bio reads, in part: "I talk about self acceptance, being queer, examining my whiteness, loving and worshipping my femininity and dreaming big" (Luxery, n.d., n.p.). As previously mentioned, sex positive, queer, fat, femme4femme desire is one theme central to both Luxery and Legay's blogs. Luxery also uses the hashtag #corporatedrag and the phrase "class play" to describe the dissonant or anxious experiences (and outfits) of working in an office or going to the bank while occupying a working class social position. As demonstrated through these tags and descriptions, the blog is a site of naming and challenging privilege, and exploring and centering marginalized identities.

This kind of participation in counterdiscourse is not unique to femme blogs or Tumblr, as the internet is politicized by other groups and in other ways (Montgomery, 2007; Gerbado, 2012; Rettberg, 2014). However, I focus on femme blogs because, considering the broader social context of femmephobia in both queer and mainstream spaces, creating a femmescape is its own important act of political resistance. Ultimately I argue that, if we consider the marginality of queer femmes in both mainstream and queer spaces, then blogs like Luxery's and Legay's become vital to the survival of femme communities and politics.

Establishing Femmescapes

Femme can mean many different things to many different people. A broad definition of femme might state that femme is a queer gender identity or expression that incorporates some aspects of "idealized" or "emphasized" femininity but rejects others (such as compulsory heterosexuality), thus making femininity queer. Femme is not simply a reproduction of femininity, but is often politicized or queered femininity (Connell, 2013). Femme has origins in lesbian culture, but is an identity that is often claimed by many queer women, heterosexual women, men, trans*, and non-binary folks (Connell, 2013). Often, the individuals who claim the identity are invested in reclaiming and celebrating the feminine as queer, subversive, and valuable — and with good reason. [3] While femmes can often go unnoticed in mainstream society due to their increased likelihood to pass as gender- and hetero-normative, femmephobia — prejudice against femmes and the feminine in general [4] — plays out in queer and feminist communities.

Butch and other masculine-of-centre gender presentations are considered more recognizably or "visibly" queer in social and community settings, which leads to the equation of the butch as the default or ideal lesbian or queer woman (Harris & Crocker, 1997; Maltry & Tucker, 2002). Some radical feminist theorizing during the 1970s and 1980s led to the denigration of femininity and butch-femme roles, constructing an androgynous gender ideal for lesbians, and an egalitarian relationship ideal in lieu of butch-femme sexual dynamics (Nestle, 1992; MacCowan, 1992; Harris & Crocker, 1997). The effects of this radical feminist theoretical framework are still felt today as certain feminine adornments — high heels, lipstick, short skirts, etc. — are still conflated with internalized misogyny, depoliticization, and concessions to the male gaze and patriarchy.

Ingram argues that queerscapes manifest because of the marginality and alienation that queer people experience in various aspects of society (1997, p. 29). The existence of a distinct queer space is vital because it “enables people with marginalized (homo) sexualities and identities to survive and to gradually expand their influence and opportunities to live fully” (Ingram, Bouthillette & Retter, 1997, p. 3). In other words, queer lives depend on the existence of queer space. Queer femmes face marginality and alienation in mainstream society as well as in queer society, and therefore carving out distinct femmescapes is crucial.

Blogging as Political Action

While I do not hope to simplify the political potential of online spaces or position them as utopian, I do seek to uncover the particular value of Tumblr to creating spaces of femme resistance. Femme resistance does not only occur online and, by definition, femmescapes do not only exist online; they are a network of politically useful spaces. This is an important distinction considering that the internet has limits for political resistance. For example, theorists like Lori Kendall (1998), among others, have countered the utopian vision of cyberspace with their findings that social hierarchies are replicated online. Luxery, too, is conscious and critical of the benefits she reaps from the white supremacy that circulates in online discourses of fat acceptance, a critique that further challenges an idealist view of the online world (2012, May 1). Some corporations have gotten wise to youth’s online identity production and have found ways to co-opt these pursuits for capital gain (Montgomery, 2007). Online spaces are still embedded within white supremacist, cis-hetero-patriarchal capitalism. However, Luxery’s critique of white supremacy in the online fat acceptance dialogue is an indication that these hierarchies do not go unnoticed or unchallenged, emphasizing that there is an active effort to create a femmescape *not* centered on whiteness. Below, I demonstrate that the political potential of femme Tumblrs is most realized by theorizing them as virtual boundary publics (Connell, 2013) and sites of prefigurative politics (van de Sande, 2013).

Like many forms of organizing, the online politics examined in this paper rely on a DIY-ethic, promoting the agency and subjectivity of marginalized communities and individuals, particularly queer femmes. Throughout my research I have found that femme bloggers create their own images, theories, and communities. I argue that these

DIY productions provide two important functions: they create space for femmes to exist and they push back against the normative discourses that create hierarchies and marginalization. These are characteristic of the same two functions that Nancy Fraser (1992) says subaltern counterpublics provide: a space of withdrawal and regroupment, and a training ground for agitational activities directed at the wider public (p. 68). Femme Tumblrs can then be understood as counterpublics: "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser, 1992, p. 67).

Even more useful to the analysis of femme blogs as sites of resistance are theories produced by Mary L. Gray (2009) and Connell (2013). Departing from Fraser's concept of subaltern counterpublics, Gray argues that queer youth instead create what she calls boundary publics, "iterative, ephemeral experiences of belonging that circulate across the outskirts and through the center(s) of a more recognized and validated public sphere" (2009, p. 92). Connell uses Gray's concept to examine a queer, fat, femme fashion blog called *Fa(t)shion February.* She argues that the blog represents a *virtual* boundary public "that creates a community of belonging through both the co-optation and the countering of predominant understanding of fashion and fashionability" (Connell, 2013, p. 216). Connell's analysis of *Fa(t)shion February* reveals its (prefigurative) political function as a space for theorizing and building queer, fat, femme identity and community, or in other words, producing counterdiscourse that has the power to alter narratives of fashion and fashionability (2013, p. 212). Connell's research underscores the significance of blogs in the creation of femmescapes: what occurs in online communities has the potential to inform a political discourse that can have material effects on the lives of marginalized groups, such as queer, fat femmes.

Fraser uses the U.S. feminist movement, with its alternative spaces including bookstores, film and publishing companies, and musical festivals, as an example of a subaltern counterpublic (1992, p.67). The so-called "third wave" of feminism continued this tradition of alternative spaces with a heightened sense of DIY ethics, as seen in the lo-fi, subcultural media-making practices of zines, riot grrrl bands, and performance troops of the 1990s and after (Kearney, 2006). This wave of feminism in part focused on deconstructing previous iterations of feminism, adding nuance and complexity to feminist ideologies. In her analysis of feminist Tumblrs, Fredrika Thelandersson (2013) argues that the technological tools offered by Tumblr are well-suited for the articulation of "third-wave subjectivities," making Tumblr an ideal site for feminist world building.

Femme bloggers can be understood as combining the subcultural, DIY traditions of U.S. feminisms, and the tradition of online organizing used by an increasing number of political groups. For instance, the internet and social media have been useful to social movements and protests like Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring as both a means of organization and a means of mobilization (Gerbaudo, 2012). The internet and social media have also been utilized in political campaigning and voter-mobilization (Montgomery, 2007). The "political" and "politics" can clearly be understood in many ways, even when only considering these concepts in relation to cyberspace. In this paper, however, I focus on an online politics that is prefigurative, a politic wherein the representation and visibility of alternate ways of being are key components to motivating cultural and social shifts.

Mathijs van de Sande states that prefigurative politics include three vital components: the creation of an alternative society existing in here and now; that this society is experimental in nature; and that within this society the means of organizing *is* the ends of organizing (2013, p. 235-236). Femme blogs embody these three principles of prefigurative politics when they are used to build identity and community; to share and articulate ideas about the world; and to develop spaces and strategies of resistance. These are the distinguishing aspects of the online politics I discuss in this paper: identity production, community building, and political theorizing.

While the political activity I examine here does have offline effects, unlike the activity described by Paolo Gerbaudo (2012), its main goal is not to choreograph assembly. The political power of the online phenomena I examine here can be found in their willingness to exist outside the mainstream, to create separate spaces, to prefigure a better, more inclusive and accepting world. *That's So Majestic* and *Tangled Up In Lace* are political in the prefigurative sense as they are temporary and ephemeral sites of a femmescape within a broader landscape of femmephobia and femme invisibility. The bloggers create this alternative by developing their own definitions of femme identities, their own supportive femme communities, and their own femme codes of conduct (or femme politic). Like Connell's virtual boundary publics, these alternatives run parallel to and intersect with mainstream society and expectations, often creating friction or dissonance on all sides. As I will illustrate, this work is done through posting selfies, asks, text posts, and reblogging all of the above, creating an environment where femmes are visible, supported, and celebrated.

Femme Identity Production Through Selfies

Luxery and Legay use their individual blogs to cultivate their own (gender)queer, fat, femme, white, working-class identities, which are evidenced in part by their use of self-portraits, or "selfies," and identity-descriptive hashtags. The selfies and hashtags listed below are demonstrative of a prefigurative politic as they are both the means through which femmescapes are enacted and the ends, or the realization, of an online femmescape. Earlier I described Luxery's use of the hashtag #meanfatgirls and selfies to create and assert her identity, and articulate how she fits in the social and political world. In addition to #meanfatgirls, other common tags used by Luxery and Legay are #fatvanity, #fatgirlsobsessedwiththemselfies, #femmes4femmes, and #genderqueermomentsintime. Like #meanfatgirls, these tags disrupt hierarchies of desirability and other modes of social value. Tags like #fatvanity and #fatgirlsobsessedwiththemselfies counter the assumption that fat bodies are not desirable or loved, while #femmes4femmes challenges the assumption that femmes are exclusively attracted to butches and masculinity, or that masculinity is ultimately more desirable than femininity. Legay, who uses the gender-neutral singular pronoun "they," uses the hashtag #genderqueermomentsintime to archive the fluidity of their gender presentation, capturing some of the complexity of a genderqueer identity.

Both bloggers' whiteness lends them visibility and legitimacy. This is true in the fat acceptance movement, as Luxery notes in a post from May 2012, but it is similarly true among representations of femmes, queers, and genderqueers. In fact, identities like femme and queer are often so saturated with white privilege and racism that they are inaccessible or unappealing to people of colour. Other times, these identities are claimed very deliberately by people of colour as a sort of a re-signification project (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2011; Crosby, 2013; Wright, 2015). Representations of genderqueerness often meet the same criticism as androgyny: favouring the white, thin, and masculinized, yet calling it neutral. Though Legay certainly benefits from their whiteness in this regard, their genderqueer identity is also imbued with fat and femme identities; this disrupts common (mis)conceptions of what being genderqueer looks like.

Jill Walker Rettberg (2014) argues that self-representation has always been an important part of our culture, and technology only makes this practice more possible for more people. Blogs and selfies can be considered descendants of diaries, self-portraits, autobiographies, and memoirs (Rettberg, 2014). Self-representation is even more important to members of marginalized communities, who rarely see flattering images of themselves, if they see any at all. For example, Rettberg notes that early

Kodak film was calibrated to capture the details of white faces, meaning people with dark skin were barely visible in photographs (2014, p. 28). She writes, “feeling misrepresented by the camera is one common reason for beginning to take selfies instead of being the subject of other people’s photographs” (Rettberg, 2014, p. 29).

Despite the persistence of self-representation over time, selfies are often hated, ridiculed, and pathologized (Rettberg, 2014, p. 17). Rettberg argues that these responses are mechanisms for disciplining selfie-takers, most often young women. The act of young women producing and sharing their own images disrupts notions of power in society, of who gets to be seen, heard, and taken seriously (2014, p. 18-19). Following this logic, it can be assumed that any marginalized or oppressed individual or group that produces and distributes their own images and tells their own stories is participating in a radical and political action. Therefore, the act of femmes photographing themselves and distributing these images and their stories online is a political one.

Being fat, femme, queer, genderqueer, and working-class are not socially valued subject positions, especially as they intersect. When Luxery and Legay post photos of their own fat, femme bodies and use the hashtags described above, they not only perform an act of self love, which is radical in itself, but they politicize the subject positions they each inhabit and disrupt notions of power in society. Luxery’s and Legay’s use of these hashtags is an example of marginalized individuals politicizing online tools and creating alternate spaces where they can be visible and celebrated. The bloggers exercise agency by posting these photos and using these tags themselves, effectively controlling their own images. In doing so, they create their own narratives and resist the fetishization of their bodies. By participating in these processes, Luxery and Legay actively create an alternative to the social systems that seek to oppress them and others who share their subject positions, an action consistent with van de Sande’s notion of prefigurative politics.

Creating Cyberspaces Through Asks

Online interactions demonstrate the “realness” of virtuality. With today’s many social media and networking platforms, it is not difficult to carve out a niche on the internet that you or your carefully curated persona can occupy. These personas or avatars exist online and interact with each other, creating an online space or virtuality (Jordan, 1999). Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and various blogging platforms are examples of online spaces. Existing research shows that online spaces are often created through exchanges of avatars who share social identities (Jordan, 1999; Driver, 2007; Gray, 2009; Connell, 2013). Susan Driver discovers this in her examination of an online birl (boyish girl) community. The collective valourization of masculine girls in the online birl community works to disrupt hegemonic ideas of gender and desirability (Driver, 2007). This type of exchange is consistent within online femme communities. To illustrate, I analyze the following interaction between Legay and another Tumblr user, which demonstrates a connection based on a shared genderqueer (GQ) identity. Using the "ask" function of Tumblr, user "underpenumbras" asked:

idk how often you check this thingy but i wanted to tell you that you were the first GQ person i ever was aware of and i was so drawn to you but i wasn't sure why. and because of your openness about feelings, i started exploring my own and that's how i found out i was also GQ. so thank you for being you openly on the Internet and making art about femme GQ stuff and etc etc etc everything! (Legay, 2015, March 31)

Legay replied:

BB ANGEL! today is making me think about how visibility is super complicated and politically loaded, but this is an example of how visibility can be really powerful, which is cute. thank you so much for the love. I lost a very magnificent and important person in my life today and I really needed to be reminded that sweetness and hope and possibility is a thing. (Legay, 2015, March 31)

Here, Legay's visibility as a femme genderqueer person on the internet encouraged another Tumblr user to explore and realize their own gender identity, highlighting the role femme blogs play in identity building. It provided a connection that will have an impact beyond Tumblr and beyond the relationship between the two bloggers, highlighting the role femme blogs play in building community. It helped affirm, at least for one person, gender fluidity in a society that clings to a strict gender binary, highlighting the role femme blogs play in developing and accessing political theories.

The exchange above illuminates the theory that visibility is an important marker of identity (Driver, 2007; Gray, 2009) and the complexity of visibility for many marginalized groups, including femmes. The equation of female masculinity with queerness often means femmes are overlooked or considered invisible in both queer and mainstream communities, invalidating the experiences and identities of queer femmes. However, many femmes, due to their race, gender expression, or other factors, are considered highly visible and face increased violence and discrimination as a result. Legay's response above refers to the loss of a friend, Taueret Davis, a queer, fat, femme of colour whose many intersecting marginalized identities made it impossible for them to live comfortably in this world (thestoutorialist, 2015).

Like Legay in the above exchange, many mourning Davis linked her experiences of oppression to her death. For example, Tumblr blogger "thestoutorialist" wrote:

I don't want an activist to return and/or inspire others. I want my friend back.

I want to hear her laugh. I want to snuggle up to her in a puppy pile. I want to trade ferosh accessories. I want to get day drunk at brunch.

I want it to be less painful to be a black woman in this world. I wish the world wasn't stacked against her fat black femme bipolar chronically-ill queer self.

I really want my friends to be able to live. (2015, April 6)

The femme politics circulating in these online femmescapes are critical of multiple oppressions, here including fatphobia, ableism, racism, and femmephobia. However, Davis, a Brooklyn-based artist, performer, activist, and Tumblr and Instagram user ("afrotitty" and "Pantherella," respectively) is not the only fat femme of colour to be lost in this way.

Building Femme Communities Through Text Posts

The online femme community has mourned its losses using the same tools it uses to celebrate and connect to one another. In March 2012, Luxery wrote a text post that read: "put on all your make up and cry it off in public. don't say sorry and don't hide your tears. mourn and grieve and celebrate goddess actuality" (Luxery, 2012, March 13a) and tagged it #calloutqueenrestinpower. This post was written in response to the suicide of fellow femme, Mark Aguhar, whose Tumblr username was "calloutqueen" (Perez, 2012, August 4). On the same day, Luxery reblogged pieces of Aguhar's art and several other posts written by other users about the blogger's death, including a "call to arms" by blogger "crashntumble" asking all grieving Aguhar to do so in public, "amongst the straight cis rich white male scum that told Mark she wasn't fit for the world" (Luxery, 2012, March 13c), a plea made by blogger "greenbrowngirl" for someone to keep "blogging for brown gurls" as Aguhar did (Luxery, 2012, March 14), and one written by Legay, which read: "today i am blasting mariah, throwing glitter into the wind, screaming at the rough seas, casting some spells and dressing to honor a goddess. be kind to yourself right now if you can. do your best to honor your grief & and create space to experience your feelings with intention" (Luxery, 2012, March 13b). These posts, and the posts mourning Davis, indicate how central femmes of colour are to this online femmescape. They work to decenter whiteness and hold white supremacist ideology accountable for the role it plays in upholding cissexism and, ultimately, marginalizing certain subjects.

The above posts communicating sorrow and outrage over the loss of another femme blogger are indicative of a femme community that reaches beyond the blogs curated by Luxery and Legay and, perhaps, beyond cyberspace altogether. It suggests that these two bloggers are part of a larger online community, or plural online communities, that have a presence in both virtuality and material reality. Further evidence of this femme community can be found when clicking on the hashtags #calloutqueenrestinpower or #ripqueentaueret which act as portals to other posts mourning the loss and celebrating the lives of these influential femme bloggers.

That these bonds can be traced online indicates the significant role femme blogs play in fostering femme community and constructing femmescapes. These posts are examples of identity work and political resistance as they articulate femme grieving practices (glittery, loud, public, and pop-music-driven), and pose challenges to dominant narratives that, arguably, push queer, fat femmes of colour to suicide, or at least out of public space (Perez, 2012, August 4; Luxery, 2012, March 14). Luxery and Legay challenge these narratives through their posts by refusing silence as an adequate response to a queer femme's death and encouraging femmes to disrupt public space with public, queer, femme crying. Many of these posts also demonstrate the prefigurative politic the blogs operate on by suggesting experimental and alternative ways to cope with grief, representing a moment of friction between femmescapes and mainstream society.

Politicizing Online Spaces Through Likes and Replies

According to Kathryn C. Montgomery (2007), identity production is integral to adolescent development. She likens online tools like homepages and blogs to teen bedrooms: in a digitized world, homepages and blogs become the new sites of identity production, allowing teens to engage with media to make sense of themselves and their culture. According to both Driver (2007) and Gray (2009), online spaces offer ideal conditions for undertaking queer identity work. In her review of Driver's book, Mollie

V. Blackburn (2010) argues "[c]onsidering the constraints on experimenting with queer identities and the risks associated with such experimentation outside of cyberspace, such opportunities in cyberspace are significant" (p. 77). It is significant that these processes occur in a niche of cyberspace; marginalized groups are confined to marginalized spaces and conduct their political and cultural work within them. This is consistent with Fraser's theory of counterpublics that challenges Jurgen Habermas' assumption that there is a singular public sphere in which political life is enacted. According to Fraser, political life is enacted in a variety of spaces as marginalized groups do not have equal access to the public sphere. To illustrate, many girlhood scholars have pointed to the bedroom as a site of girl culture and girls' cultural production (McRobbie, 1991; Driscoll, 2002; Kearney, 2006). Seemingly innocuous spaces, like a young girl's bedroom, can then become politicized spaces. Similarly, Tumblr, a site known for selfies and gifs, can become a site of political activity and resistance.

Much like youth, femmes also use online spaces and tools to cultivate their identities and foster community. Last year Legay posted a self-portrait with the caption "was having anxiety about going outside so I got dressed rlly cute and then some fucking bros EGGED me. so if you need me I'll be crying my falsies off and feeling bad for myself that violence has to be an everyday reality if I'm presenting my gender in a way that feels authentic/real" (Legay, 2014, April 8). This post garnered 62 notes [5] at last count, including many replies containing supportive and validating messages, such as: "**lobsterleyla** (http://lobsterleyla.tumblr.com/) said: omfg i'm so sorry that happened to you *big internet hug*" (Legay, 2014, April 8) and "**limberlost** (http://limberlost.tumblr.com/) said: I'm so sorry! Hope you feel safer soon and can rock it. Your words and pix have helped me lots x" (Legay, 2014, April 8).

The responses to Legay's post are characteristic of Driver's notion of online community, which she describes as systems of caring relations that go beyond physical and traditional understandings, enacted through symbolic and imaginative gestures, that have tremendous impact, regardless of their brevity (Driver, 2007, p. 176). The responses above extend support and care toward Legay through words of encouragement and symbolic gestures (ie. "*big internet hug*") and indicate Legay's positive influence as they navigate their own experiences, often shared experiences of gender nonconformity and queerness.

Legay uses cyberspace to experiment with their offline and online genderqueer identity; on different blogs, Legay uses different names and pronouns, and frequently posts and engages with other users about their gender fluidity. These posts not only demonstrate Legay's participation in online communities, but also further suggest that the blog *That's So Majestic* is a virtual boundary public, a space for femme genderqueer identity work and resisting hegemonic notions of gender that extend beyond the author/curator.

Conclusion

The blogs curated by Luxery and Legay examined in this paper demonstrate how femmes politicize online tools to create much-needed femmescapes. The role of femme blogging as a political act of resistance and survival is best analyzed through a prefigurative model of politics, as articulated by van de Sande (2013). The blogs examined here are spaces where an alternative world is not only visualized, but realized through virtual processes that both run parallel to and intersect with mainstream society. These alternatives are envisioned and enacted by the bloggers as they document their experimental approaches to gender identity and expression, systems of care, practices, and political values. The blogs curated by Luxery and Legay are both the means through which these alternatives are articulated as well as the realization of the alternatives they have been constructing.

Insisting that online activity "counts" as political follows the same logic as disrupting femmephobia and femme invisibility. It is hardly a coincidence that femmescapes are constructed across a myriad of forms that are often dismissed or trivialized by the mainstream, including the internet, where they become "slacktivists," and selfies, where they become "narcissistic" or in need of "help." Queer femmes do not have equal access to the public sphere nor to queer spaces, as they are marginalized in both, so like queer youth and girls, they must create spaces "across the outskirts and through the center(s) of a more recognized and validated public sphere" (Gray, 2009, p. 92). Femininity is trivialized and considered apolitical, just as selfies and the internet often are. Pushed to the margins, femmes take advantage of these "parallel, discursive spaces" to "invent and circulate counterdiscourses" (Fraser, 1992, p. 67).

Of course, femme blogs are only one aspect of femmescapes, and it is important to resist flattening cyberspace into a single utopian vision. With all the benefits of existing online, there are risks. As mentioned earlier, online spaces do not go untouched by the often grim realities of our social hierarchies; the limits of our social world follow us online, and some new limits are produced. Corporations capitalize on youths' identity pursuits, using them for data mining and market research in hopes to profit from them, free hosting of youths' pages are often offered in exchange for advertising space, and the push for youth to vote was orchestrated by those with financial and political interests of their own (Montgomery, 2007, p. 117, 180). In addition, cyberviolence and cyberbullying are an increasingly real concerns and often have serious offline consequences (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Berson, Berson & Ferron, 2002). Further, Connell found that the challenges posed by *Fa(t)shion February* had little impact on broader society's understanding of gender and sexuality. These "negatives" of online activity do not disqualify it from being politically valuable, but generate a more complex picture of how online spaces can be utilized.

Connell's study suggests blogging may not have an immediate or widespread effect on broader society's views, but that also does not mean its value dissipates. It may be enough for queers to know these spaces exist and to participate in them. In the wake of the defeatism and skepticism that followed the momentum of Occupy Wall Street and other movements of the "Twitter-volution," van de Sande (2013) pushed for a reimagination of these moments as prefigurative. Van de Sande calls to stop evaluating movements based on outcomes or "success" and instead focus on what these movements actually do (2013, p. 227). Van de Sande argues that from a prefigurative perspective, **Tahrir Square** (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tahrir_Square) was "successful" because, while temporary, it offered a space to experiment with alternative ways of organizing society and for people to freely express their political concerns (2013, p. 233-235). In this paper I have argued that femme blogs provide precisely this role. While the existence of these spaces may be short-term, and individual engagement in them may be even more brief, the impact is lasting. The unlimited capacity and the archival nature of the internet means future waves of users can access and continue to participate in the political conversations that occur in these spaces. The impact of accessing and participating in online femme communities on individuals would make another compelling study.

It is important to understand femme blogging as political because it disrupts notions of what is considered political, who gets to participate, and who gets to decide. If femmes are excluded or face oppression in more traditional forms of political resistance, then they might forever be excluded from political discourse. If we shift our ideas around what is political and what is resistance, and where and how this all happens, we see a broader range of femme political participation. This combats stereotypes of the passive, apolitical, dependent femme, and helps to reconstruct femme as powerful and agentic. Changing how we view "politics" and "the political" means changing how we view femme. This nuanced view of politics and political activity can also be applied to communities who experience barriers to other forms of political participation that get minimized by the term "slacktivist," including youth, people with disabilities, people of colour, and undocumented immigrants, permanent residents, or others with restrictive citizenship status. These ideas must be challenged so that marginalized communities' resistance and theorizing can be recognized, valued, and utilized to create more nuanced and inclusive politics.

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End Notes

[1] Femme4femme, which could be understood as "femme seeking femme," is an orientation or mode of desirability that disrupts the dominance of masculinity and femmephobia in queer erotic communities. Written in text speak, femme4femme riffs off (and directly challenges) "masc4masc," a detail that frequently appears on online dating profiles, denoting a 'masculine' gay man seeking other 'masculine' gay men.

[2] Luxery and Legay are clear that the view of their personal lives available through Tumblr is very curated. Legay's Tumblr bio reads: "i am majestic. this is a curated glimpse into my deeply deluxe deeply bodacious lifestyle" (n.d.). This self-awareness, coupled with my conceptualization of Tumblr as a "public," support the understanding of these blogs as public and, therefore, my decision to not seek permission to analyze the bloggers' posts.

[3] On her blog *Leaving Evidence*, Mia Mingus distinguishes between being "descriptively femme" and "politically femme," and explores some of the political reasons folks who may be "descriptively femme" may not identify as "politically femme."

[4] For more on femmephobia, see Blair, K.L. & Hoskin, R. A. (2015). Experiences of femme identity: coming out, invisibility and femmephobia. Psychology & Sexuality, 6(3), 229-244.

[5] "Notes" on Tumblr are made up of likes, reblogs, and replies. The more notes a post has, the more popular it is on the site.

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BLOGGING FEMME FEMMESCAPES ONLINE COMMUNITY PEER REVIEWED PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS

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