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Fuck Patriarchy! An Analysis of Digital Mainstream Media Discussion of the #freethenipple Activities in Iceland in March 2015.

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ABSTRACT

This article contributes to recent research on young women's emerging feminist movements or feminist counter-publics (see Salter, 2013) in the digital age. The focus is on the #freethenipple protests in Iceland in 2015 organised by young women and the ensuing debates in mainstream digital news media and popular ezines. A feminist, post-structuralist perspective is adopted to analyse the discursive context in which the debates and discussions about the protest are embedded, but we are also informed by recent theories about role of affect in triggering and sustaining political movements. The data corpus consists of 60 texts from the digital public domain published during and after the protests. The young women's political movement is construed as a revolution centering on reclaiming the body from the oppressive structures of patriarchy which, through shame and pornification, have taken their bodies and their ability to choose, in a post-feminist context, from them. Public representations of the protest are mostly supportive and many older feminists are affectively pulled by the young women's rhetoric about how patriarchy has blighted their lives. We argue that the young women manage to claim space as agents of change but highlight the importance of the support or affective sustenance they received from older feminists.

Keyword: Young women, social media, feminism, body politics, Iceland, #freethenipple, affective solidarity, counter-public

Dear patriarchy,

You know that when you tell me to calm down,

And to shut up,

You drive me onwards,

to scream at the top of my lungs-

You can't stop what you know is coming.¹

(Torfadóttir, 2015).

Introduction

The year 2015 marked the centennial anniversary of the women's right to vote in Iceland. Many public feminist events were successfully organized and executed. However, the limelight of the mainstream media was taken by young women who used social network sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, to organize feminist activities. Such hubs of feminist activities are a good example of what recent feminist analyses (e.g. Harris, 2008; Salter, 2013) refer to as feminist counter-publics. The idea of the feminist counter-public originates from Nancy Fraser (1990) and refers to discursive arenas that contest 'the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public, elaborating alternative styles of political behaviour and alternative norms of public speech' (p. 116, as cited in Harris, 2008). Young feminist counter-publics on social media networks have been the focus of recent research, but less attention has been given to how they enter and then are represented in mainstream digital news media as part of the digital public (notable exception is Salter, 2013). In this article, we explore only one of many events originated by young feminists in Iceland in 2015, with a focus on how it became part of public media discussions

¹ Translated by Iceland Monitor

and debates. #freethenipple refers to a campaign that extends well beyond Iceland, but its aim is to draw attention to the double standards directed against the female body and the sexualisation of the breast ('What is Free the Nipple?', n.d.). By taking part in this campaign, young women in Iceland not only joined a global feminist movement but signalled that they were active political agents who wanted to have a say in matters pertaining to their lives and futures. This is important as young women tend to be seen, i.e. presented in terms of sexual attractiveness in mainstream media, but not heard or taken seriously as political commentators in the male dominated public (Harris, 2008, Salter, 2013).

We adopt a feminist poststructuralist perspective (Gavey, 1989) to analyse digital public discussion and debates about #freethenipple in Iceland, but we are also informed by recent theories about the role of affect in triggering and sustaining political movements (e.g. Hemmings, 2012; Probyn, 1993). Hemmings (2012) argues that feminist politics leading to feminist transformation begins with affective dissonances rather than identity politics. She draws on the work of Elspeth Probyn (1993) who identifies how reflexivity of the 'lack of fit between our own sense of being and the world's judgement upon us' (Hemmings, 2012, p. 2) can mark the start of a feminist reflexive process. We feel that something is amiss. The identification of this dissonance as shared can create a community or movement, an affective solidarity that serves as the impetus to generate alternative values and different ways of thinking that, in turn, allow us to feel differently. To become political, these dissonances must be related to social injustices and resonate with the experiences of others. The poem above, written by a 15 year old feminist, clearly demonstrates affective dissonance but also derives meaning and direction from being embedded in a feminist discourse. Digital connections on social networking sites, as Keller, Mendes and Ringrose (2016) point out, may enable new forms of feminist affective solidarity. But how is young feminist solidarity and the affect that drives it

represented and packaged in the digital public domain? How do different groups relate to the messages from young feminists? Our aim is to contribute to recent academic research on ‘emerging’ feminist discourses in the digital age but with a focus on how young women can and do claim space as active agents of change in the digital public (e.g. Baer, 2016; Dobson, 2014; Keller et al., 2016; Rentschler, 2014). We also focus on how their feminist practices relate to global and local constructions of feminism and young femininity. Before we present our analysis, we discuss the discursive context in which young Western femininity is embedded and how the challenges young women face inform their feminist practices.

Young femininity and feminism in a post-feminist, digital age

Boyd’s (2014) description of young people as digital natives gives a particularly apt portrayal of young people in Iceland, where internet use in 2010 was already, ‘near universal among children 12 years and older’ (Bjarnason, Gudmundsson, & Olafsson, 2011, p. 647). Freedom House reports that Iceland has the highest percentage of internet users in Europe, or 98% (‘Iceland | Country report | Freedom on the Net | 2016’, n.d.) but the population of Iceland is small, or just over 330.000. Smart-phones and tablets are everyday accessories and feature heavily in young people’s communication with each other. In turn, social media sites have become important forums for sharing and managing information and connections with others (Harris, 2008; Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016). Hutton, Griffin, Lyons, Niland and McCreanor (2016) argue that social media is such a mundane part of young women’s everyday lives that it is difficult to distinguish between online and offline lives.

Research into young women’s and girls’ use of the social media shows that they take their cues from cultural norms when deciding what to post and how to present themselves online (e.g. Bailey, Steeves, Burkell, & Regan, 2013). In this regard, McRobbie (2008) points out how post-feminist discourses and ideologies have structured representation of femininities in Western societies. In a post-feminist world, feminism is seen to have already achieved its goal

and, therefore, to have made itself redundant (McRobbie, 2004, 2008). Young women are considered the primary 'beneficiaries of increased opportunities' (Scharff, 2012, p. 1) and have only themselves to blame if they fail to take advantage. They are encouraged to become the best versions of themselves, but, for that, they must make the right lifestyle choices, train their bodies so that they are fit and hot and manage their education and career so they can make informed choices to maximize their potential (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2004; Griffin, Szmigin, Bengry-Howell, Hackley, & Mistral, 2013; Renold & Ringrose, 2011).

The performance of young femininity is particularly tricky when it comes to sexuality (Griffin et al, 2013). Young women have to tread a narrow and risky line where they are sexy and up for it (Gill, 2007) but not slutty to safeguard their sexual reputation. Evans, Riley and Shankar (2010) refer to these practices as technologies of sexiness where agency is expressed through working on oneself and one's body. Young women's visibility and hierarchical status depends on the extent to which they please the eye. At the same time, the loss of sexual respectability brings on shame and lowers young women's value in the heterosexual market, especially if they do not hold a position of privilege and power (Griffin et al., 2013; Ringrose & Renold, 2012). In this regard, Ringrose (2012), drawing on Ahmed's (2010) work, points out how the label slut is a 'sticky signifier that glues bad affects onto girls' bodies' (p.93). The mixed messages surrounding the management of the sexy female body explain, in part, why issues around embodiment and sexuality are a source of anxiety for young women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). As Ahmed (2010) argues: 'bodies can get stuck depending on what feelings they are associated with' (p.39). The body in shame feels different than the body in pleasure (Probyn, 2010). In this respect, the shame and anxiety attached to not measuring up to respectable femininity is an important regulatory feature that young women have made part of their subjectivity (Gill, 2007). Public discussion of young women's and, in particular, girls' use of social media reflects a similar kind of anxiety (Dobson, 2014; Jackson, Vares, & Gill, 2013)

and has been criticized for reproducing conservative discourses about young women's sexualities where they are represented either in terms of being pure or spoiled. Rather than unpacking how young women's experiences of unwanted sexual attention is caused by sexist discourses, the focus is on how to restrict or monitor young women's and girls' access to these digital platforms (Aapola et al., 2004, Dobson, 2014).

Gústafsdóttir's (2016) analysis of interviews with women in popular women's magazines in Iceland published from 1980-2000 concludes that, during that era, feminism was not part of the mainstream representations of femininity (Gústafsdóttir, 2016). However, we argue that feminism has been visible from the side-lines (or as a counter-public) and has had the potential to disrupt. Since the 70s, there have been vibrant feminist movements in Iceland that now and then make headlines in mainstream news media (Þorvaldsdóttir, 2011). On October 24, 1975, approximately 90% of the female population took the day off from work bringing the country to a near standstill (Rúðólfsdóttir, 2005). Many of the activities organized by the Red Stocking movement, a second-wave radical movement, and later the Women's List and the Women's Alliance, are memorable and had a tangible effect on Icelandic society (Erlendsdóttir, 1993, Jónsdóttir, 2007). These included forming an all-women's party in the 80s that left a lasting structural legacy in terms of getting women elected to parliament and making childcare affordable (Rúðólfsdóttir, 2014). These movements also left behind concepts, ways to think about women's experiences and relate them to systematic injustices that are, despite not being incorporated into mainstream post-feminist discourses of femininity, part of cultural memory and, as such, present discursive opportunities. Good examples are concepts such as patriarchy and objectification.

Mackay (2015) identifies the early 2000s as the starting point of a new peak in feminism. This trend is, in part, explained by young women's ability to use social media networks as platforms to discuss and organize their activities (Harris, 2008; Keller et al., 2016; Rentschler

& Thrift, 2015; Salter, 2013; Schuster, 2013). The social network sites as counter-publics not only provide an important forum to share personal experiences and discuss issues that concern feminists e.g. sexual violence, revenge porn, harassment (Salter, 2013) and rape culture (Mendes, 2015), but also provide care and support for those who come forward with difficult experiences (Rentschler, 2014). Mendes (2015, drawing on Herman, 1978) defines rape culture as ‘a socio-cultural context in which an aggressive male sexuality is eroticized and seen as a “healthy”, “normal” and “desired” part of sexual relations’ (p.2). Events and protests organized in feminist counter-publics, such as the SlutWalk, attempt to address and change this culture by re-signifying labels such as slut and turn it into political categories of unity. In other words, young women refuse to take on the role of the victim and to accept slut as a signifier of shame (Ringrose & Renold, 2012).

For the feminist movements in Iceland (in both younger and older generations), the battle with sexist discourses and rape culture is ongoing. There is a commonality in the attitudes that underpin the statistics reported in 2010, that 24% of women in Iceland had experienced sexual violence (Karlisdóttir & Arnalds, 2010) and the fact that young women in Iceland feel threatened by revenge porn (Þorvaldsdóttir, 2015). To tackle these issues, there have been concerted actions from feminists in Iceland, e.g. feminist organizations such as Stígamót (an education and counselling centre for survivors of sexual abuse and violence), that have raised discussions and drawn attention to the seriousness of sexual abuse and rape. In these efforts, there are recurring notions around the concept of shame and shifting shame from the victims/survivors to the perpetrators.. There is a dearth of research into recent, young feminist movements in Iceland, but young feminists have been stepping forward, for example on the rap scene (e.g. Reykjavíkurdætur, e. Daughters of Reykjavík) and in art (e.g. Kynleikar, e. Genderplay). Their arguments are in line with recent research on emerging feminist movements in the UK, Germany and the US that stress the politics of the body (Baer, 2016; Keller, et al,

2016, Rentschler and Thrift, 2015). However, these young, Icelandic artists also stress issues around women's sexual desires and pleasure.

As we have already indicated the locus of our exploration is not the public as represented by "old media" technologies, such as television, newspaper and radio' (Salter, 2013, p. 2), but new mainstream media as it is represented in the digital public domain. Newman et.al. (2012) point out how the omnipresence of the internet has changed public media significantly. They further argue that the relationship between social media and public news media is mutual and intricate. Social network sites allow individuals to produce their own media and reflections on news items. In this sense, we may have, as Salter (2013) argues, publics rather than a public. In Iceland, most mainstream newspapers are now available in digital form with news, in-depth analysis and opinion pieces that can be shared on social network sites. Digital technology has also led to the development of several new digital media publications in Iceland, both newspapers and ezines (electronic magazines), that make the division between the public and the counter-public even more porous (see Salter, 2013). In our exploration, we focus both on digital media publics, such as online news sites, but also on popular ezines directed at and representing different interest groups, including feminists. Feminist practices are either validated or disparaged once they enter the public, but Salter (2013) notes that counter speech 'can only circulate up to a point, at which it is certain to meet intense resistance' (p. 227). Collision points, resistances and attempts to re-contextualise issues that matter to young feminists shed a light on competing discourses and provide important insight into our research questions.

Method

Data and data collection

The data consists of text items, i.e. news articles and opinion pieces from digital public media and popular ezines discussing #freethenipple. The text had to be published on and after the 25th of March 2015 when the #freethenipple protests started. The main topic of the text items also had to be #freethenipple. The search word used was simply the hashtag #freethenipple. We limited ourselves to digital texts aimed at an Icelandic audience, but the articles in the data corpus were written in both Icelandic and English. The data analysis was conducted in Icelandic but the quotes in Icelandic, used in the article, were translated by the authors. Convenience and easy access was a factor when we decided to collect digital media texts but we also followed our intuition that most of the contributors to the discussion collided in the space of digital public media, i.e. mainstream discourses dictating what is proper and normal in terms of young women's experiences and behaviour and the counter discourses with oppositional interpretations of young women's interests and needs.

The data consists of 60 selected texts. The texts originate from digital versions of established media in Iceland (mbl.is, visir.is, dv.is, frettatiminn.is) including the online version of the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service (ruv.is), more recent digital news and current affairs media (Stundin.is, Kjarninn.is, Nutiminn.is), and popular ezines catering to different interest groups: men, women and feminists (Grapevine.is, Menn.is, Bleikt.is, Knuz.is, Kvennabladid.is). The data were copied and incorporated into Atlas.ti (Hwang, 2008). Analysis involved repeated and close reading of the data in order to draw out how the #freethenipple activities were constructed, the discursive resources drawn on in those constructions and the subject positions contained within them (Banister, Burman, & Parker, 1997; Willig, 2001). In this regard, we were particularly interested in the arguments made for and against the revolution, paying attention to their moral and affective subtext and appeal.

Before we present our analysis, we think it is important to bear in mind that the young women who initiated the campaign in Iceland are, in many ways, a privileged group and do not represent all young women in Iceland. Most of the young women were students in well-respected, upper-tier secondary school, from middle class backgrounds, white and able bodied. The protests draw out issues that are important to them and their generation, and they used the media available to do so. We would also like to point out that breastfeeding in public is generally an accepted practice in Iceland.

Analysis

The #freethenipple movement struck a nerve in Icelandic society as could be seen by the flood of articles and news in digital mainstream media that discussed, described and analysed the protests. The features of the campaign that were covered and discussed in the public digital domain were tweets from participants in the protests and protests advertised on social media as well as #freethenipple events advertised online but taking place in offline public spaces. Examples of offline practices that got significant news coverage were when young women took to the streets and exposed their nipples in front of the House of Parliament, attended schools top-less, and organised events in the swimming pools and main communal square in Reykjavík. Most of the text items appeared over a period of only a few days, but some appeared a year later to discuss what was gained by #freethenipple. Public digital media featured a number of interviews with young women who participated in the protest. As events unfolded, there also emerged interviews and opinion pieces from other parties, e.g. older feminists, academics, and so-called concerned citizens. It was interesting and in line with Newman's (2011) observation about the intricate relationship between social media and mainstream media, that many of the news items consisted entirely of selected texts from social media, e.g. screenshots of chosen tweets without much or any commentary or the re-publishing of extracts from Facebook statuses of well-known people in Iceland (e.g. Nutiminn.is, 25. March, 2015). In that way,

digital public media worked as a filter and selective conveyor of messages from the feminist counter-public. We also witnessed, as avid users of social media ourselves, how many of the digital news and opinion pieces were then presented again in social media. Overall, we found that the tone of the articles and discussion in this digital public space was supportive. A possible reason for the positive coverage was that some of the reporters were young women who worked for the media in question. They surfaced as gatekeepers to the public space. Most of them seemed to have a genuine interest in the motives behind the protests. The impression we got was that the young activists did not have to elbow their way into public digital discussion about the events, but were sought out for comments about their feminist practices, as were several older feminists who joined the movement.

We organize the analysis into four main sections with the aim of capturing how events unfolded and how the rationale behind this feminist movement was presented, developed, challenged and further developed or solidified. We start with an outline of how the young women and other participants presented the rationale for their activities in mainstream digital news media and place their arguments in a discursive context. A recurrent description of the protest was that it was a revolution that centred on claiming the body back from patriarchy. The second and third sections present analyses of how the media channelled and constructed reactions to the events from older feminists, experts and concerned others, who debated what these activities really meant, whether the young women could be seen as bona fide feminists and whether the revolution was actually a proper revolution. Here, we outline how and when different discursive constructions of the events found a common ground or collided. We then discuss more reactive responses to the young women's protests, including from the porn industry. The fourth section maps how the feminist activists' responses to these resistances was represented and construed.

The Revolution: Claiming the body back from Patriarchy.

The build-up to #freethenipple was described in a number of interviews with the protesters. A recurring story line was of a young woman who posted a photo of herself bare-breasted on Twitter and then was publicly shamed by commentators. The comments were observed by other young women who decided to post supportive photos and pose bare-breasted with the hashtag #freethenipple. The protests snowballed as feminist societies from different, upper-tier secondary schools and the University of Iceland joined in the activities along with older feminists. A #freethenipple day was declared and young women were encouraged to take part but could choose whether they went topless or not. Soon their practices started to be referred to as a revolution.

The digital world has been aflame today as women as well as men celebrate the nipple.

This incredible discussion started after a young Icelandic girl posted a photo of herself on Twitter. Since then photos of bare-breasted women have poured in along with supportive messages from all over... The reason why Adda removed her photo strongly underscores why this particular revolution was needed (bleikt.is, 25. March, 2016).

A repeated description was that young women felt as if they had lost power over their bodies. The revolution consisted of claiming that back. 'Many women have bared their breasts to gain the power to define their own bodies' (Stundin, 27. March, 2015). 'This isn't really about breasts but about women having power over their breasts. It is about a complete change of attitude' (Frettatiminn.is, 12. June, 2015).

The way neo-liberal, postfeminist discourses structured the young women's argument could be seen in their emphasis on the freedom to choose; to be empowered to be who-ever you choose to be (McRobbie, 2008): being able to take your top off if you so desire because you are either too hot or just 'really like your breasts' (Stundin.is, 27. March, 2015).

For me, this is about being the way you want. That you can decide not to wear a bra or wear a transparent top and show your breasts and nipples. At the same time, if you feel comfortable in a bra, then you can wear it as well (Visir.is, 25, March, 2015).

However, young women referred to concepts usually related to discourses of radical feminism when they discussed the restraints they felt barred them from being themselves. The revolution revolved around overthrowing patriarchy and one young woman described their intentions as ‘fucking gender norms’ (Grapevine.is, 26 March, 2015). Patriarchy appeared both in terms of the everyday injustices they experienced and as a kind of brainwashing mechanism.

Why can I not determine when I show my body myself? No one else owns my body. Just me. Patriarchy and society have put this in my mind that I can’t determine when I show my body myself (Stundin.is, 30. March, 2015).

The young women’s descriptions of how they felt about their bodies figured strongly as a reason to join the movement, i.e. something was amiss (Hemmings, 2012). Patriarchy was oppressive and took away their pleasure in and enjoyment of their bodies. It defined them as bodies rather than as embodied agents. The feelings the young women identified as attached to their bodies were, in particular, those of shame. This is in line with recent research into political arguments made by young feminists (e.g. Baer, 2016). In this regard, slut-shaming, pornification of the breast, revenge porn and gendered double standards were frequently mentioned, especially as the revolution evolved. ‘It is about certain oppression of women. For me at least it touches me profoundly as a “fuck you” to slut shaming’ (Stundin, 27. March, 2016).

There were many references to how the young women felt shamed by experiences of sexual abuse and harassment, and also by not measuring up to societal standards of beauty. They proposed that shame should be attached to the perpetrators of sexual abuse rather than survivors-victims. They described the removal of the burden of shame as the source of great

empowerment. In this sense, shame as a sticky signifier (Ahmed, 2010, Ringrose, 2012) was being unstuck so that women could feel differently about their bodies.

My friend hasn't dared to go swimming for many years because she was so unhappy with her body. She says that she has never been as happy with her body now that she has posted a photo of her breasts on the internet. This really affects girls' self-confidence. They feel more secure about themselves and they find this empowering (Stundin.is, 30. March, 2015).

One of the most beautiful events that I witnessed was when I saw a survivor of online sexual violence participate in #freethenipple. She stated that she wanted to take back the power over her own body. Sexual violence is about power, whether online or offline. Now we have the power. We took it into our own hands (Knuz.is, 31. March, 2015).

Patriarchy was, in particular, seen to materialise through the porn industry, especially revenge porn, and the young women wanted to remove power from the porn industry. The idea was to flood the internet with photos of their breasts to normalize the breast and change its meaning.

I posted a photo and I just thought: 'Damn, will I regret this one day?' Then I thought, it doesn't matter. We are devaluing revenge porn and this does more than we think it does. So this is nothing to be ashamed of (Visir.is, 26. March, 2015).

To face the fear and post photos of your breast is liberating. Then fear no longer controls the individual. Even though not all women post photos of their breasts it is enough that a number of them do, to normalize the photos. This must be one of the best and most original solutions to revenge porn even though it is not perfect. (Visir.is, 27. March, 2015).

In reclaiming the body, the young women aimed to change the meaning of the breast: 'breasts aren't genitals' (Visir.is, 25 March, 2015), 'It's just a body part' (Grapevine, 26. March,

2015). A number of older feminists supported them and posted photos of themselves with the #freethenipple hashtag. A feminist who is also a Member of Parliament tweeted photo of her breast with the message: 'This one here is for feeding babies, shove that up your patriarchy' (Grapevine.is, 26. March, 2015). A well-known television presenter posted a photo of herself bare-breasted in a tutu with comments about what a shame it was to cover up these beauties (Visir.is, 25. March, 2015). This made headlines in digital media and served to draw further attention to the young women's protest.

To sum up, the young women saw themselves as part of a revolution against patriarchy. The battleground of the revolution and what the women wanted to claim for themselves was their body. The young feminists' focus on body politics is in line with recent research conducted into the motives for young women's digital activism (Baer, 2016; Keller, et al, 2016, Rentschler & Thrift, 2015). They recognised slut-shaming, pornification of the breast and revenge porn as the symptoms of an unjust and unequal system. We were struck with how comfortably the young women merged the post-feminist notions of choice with concepts such as patriarchy that are usually linked to radical feminism. Patriarchy was identified as the source that takes away women's power to choose, devalues them and their ability to be themselves and to enjoy their bodies.

Feminist reactions to #freethenipple: Is this a revolution?

As in the research conducted by Keller et al. (2016), the visibility of the feminist counter-space in public digital media connected the young feminist women to a wider feminist community. The reactions to the young women's protests were mixed. Most centred on the revolution, whether the young women could truly change the context in which they experienced their sexuality and feel empowered by their participation. In both positive and negative feminist reactions to #freethenipple, there were attempts to understand why young women mobilized to

take action. Older feminists who expressed solidarity with the young women talked about the process they followed in their attempts to understand what the protest was about and how the young women's experiences were different from their own. In this regard, older feminists recognised that the challenges young women face, are in many ways, unique to their generation and strange, but they were moved to support them because they felt their campaign touched on deeply-felt issues that could benefit all women. There was a sense of affective resonance that Hemmings (2012) sees as an element of the formation of affective solidarity.

And what is strange is also scary. I am not raised with the fear of revenge porn and do not feel able to tell girls how to react to it. They found their own way. This is how a new generation can take power into their own hands and create a stronger solidarity among young women than I remember from my time. Where could this power take us if it was allowed to carry on? Perhaps all the way out of patriarchy? (Stundin.is, 1. April, 2015).

Supporting the young women was, in part, seen to require giving up ownership of a movement. An older feminist described how her feelings towards the #freethenipple movement changed from fury to appreciation.

Maybe I was irate because young girls dared to think up feminist activities that had not been blessed by me and my generation (...) I thought about the girls (...) who were so happy and exposed their breasts because they are sick and tired of being pornified. And I thought it does not matter that I don't understand the revolution. (...) Perhaps it is part of developing your own ideology that you don't try to steer it too much or clip the wings of those who join later (Knuz.is, 27. March, 2015).

Other feminists saw a historical continuum between the young women's revolution and their own. They noted that women in the 70s burned their bras but young women today take them off (mbl.is, 27. March, 2015). The Women's Rights Association in Iceland, the oldest feminist society in Iceland (founded in 1907), sent out a heartfelt and emotional announcement

in support of the young women that was published by the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service. Their feelings of solidarity came across in their recognition of the young women as sisters. Generations of feminists can unify in the fight against patriarchy.

We, the women of the executive board of the Icelandic Women's Rights Association, would like to say to our younger sisters: if you face hostility, be sure that you are doing something right. We bear in our bosoms (alas, fully-clothed) love and support for your actions and look forward to standing with you, side by side, to face the ever-diminishing patriarchy (Ruv.is, March, 27, 2015).

However, criticism was also raised. Concerns were voiced that the young women would merely solidify the very patriarchal discourses they were attempting to change. Perhaps some felt that the movement was not radical enough and signified more of a post-feminist moment.

At the same time, we can reflect on whether this will have the effect that there will be a revolution and women will get the power to define their own bodies or whether this will further support established ideas that link femininity to the body and masculinity to the mind. There is also a question of how revolutionary this is in the society we presently live in and whether this merely supports the ideology we are part of here and now (Stundin.is, 27. March, 2015).

There were also recognitions of the young women's experiences that brought up a string of negative associations and affect. The editor of the *Kvennabladid* (Women's Magazine) recounted her own 'irresponsible' behaviour as a young woman, when she bared her breasts and got herself into situations that affected her negatively, including low self-image and sexual assault. She pointed out that the young women not only place themselves in a vulnerable position, but also encourage younger girls, still in primary school, to post photos of themselves on the internet. The focus was on risks, signalling the anxiety surrounding discourses of young women's sexuality (Dobson, 2013) but also the very real danger that girls, who are not in a position of power, face (see e.g. Renold and Ringrose, 2012).

And are those photos of schoolgirl's breasts empowering? Who has the power? Not they, themselves that is for sure. In 15 minutes these photos of children will be stored on paedophile websites where they will stay for the future to come (Kvennabladid.is, 27. March, 2015).

To sum up, the young women's activism struck a chord with feminists from older generations. However, some felt they needed time to figure out the causes of the young women's actions. There were both positive and negative affective connections with the young women's arguments. Many older feminists saw a purpose in the protest that resonated with their experiences and seemed to relate, especially in the use of the concept of patriarchy. Others had doubts about whether the young women's actions were appropriate. The risks were potentially too high and would not necessarily lead to empowerment but rather to entrenchment of hegemonic, patriarchal values.

Patriarchy strikes back.

Salter (2013) argues that, at some point, digital feminist activism (or counter-arguments) is bound to meet with serious resistance. Only a day after the news about the #freethenipple tweets appeared, there were reports on how various pornographic sites had sampled the photos that the young women posted on Twitter, inviting readers to download the photos and rate the breasts (Visir, 26. March, 2015, DV.is, 29. March, 2016). This response can be read as an attempt to remind the young women of their place in a patriarchal society and to reposition them into the uncomfortable space where they are rated and (de)valued in terms of their sexiness (Evans et al., 2010, Griffin et al. 2012). Shame was re-stuck to the young activist bodies (Ahmed, 2010, Ringrose, 2012).

Some supposedly well-meaning male commentators also attempted to remind the young women how to perform their femininity appropriately. They suggested that the young women

should change their methodology because they were doing precisely what men wanted them to do, i.e. behaving like strippers and thereby as sluts. Men find breasts sexy no matter what women do.

To change the attitude, you have to start from the beginning... I doubt that men will insist that women keep their clothes on. I thought we were precisely always trying to get women to remove their clothing... and we often even pay for that... we call them strippers (Menn.is, 28. March, 2015).

A noted police officer chose to depict many of the young women as just seeking attention or as blindly following a trend and that this could have unforeseen and grave consequences. There were again concerns about younger girls, who would not really have the capacity to understand the repercussions of following in the activists' footsteps. Again, the discursive construction of young women as vulnerable and at risk was drawn upon (Aapola, et al. 2004, Dobson, 2013).

I also have to admit that I am bit afraid that young and tender girls will get swept along and post photos of their breasts on the internet. What if they regret it and what consequences will it have for their little souls? I, of course, hope all will go well and that everyone will end up proud and happy but there is this: 'what if?' (Vísir, 26. March, 2015).

The patriarchal reactions to the young women's activism were rapid and portrayed just how powerful and resourceful traditional masculine institutions such as the porn industry are. Being a girl or a young woman is recognized as a position of risk and vulnerability.

Defiance through solidarity against Patriarchy

The digital media sought the young women's views and reactions to the criticism posed against #freethenipple. Part of the media sided with the young women and the digital news website Stundin.is, that gave much positive coverage to the protests, collected '[t]he 10 best of the worst

reaction to #freethenipple' (2. April, 2015), describing them as silly and or reactionary. The discussions and reactions to #freethenipple provided a chance for the activists to further outline what they meant with some of the concepts they used. The arguments that were made against the young feminists were described and dismissed as patriarchal.

Telling us that it (#freethenipple) does not empower anyone but abusers and to suggest that the women who participated have no independent thought or will, and only participated because of public encouragement. (...) Isn't this the exact discourse we are trying to stop? Isn't this the exact discourse that contributes to rape culture? (...) the strongest weapon against online sexual violence is to stop all shaming of young women's bodies (Knuz.is, 31. March, 2015).

A number of older feminists stepped into the fray, both to draw attention to how seriously patriarchy could react to the revolution, but also to defend the young women's actions and to encourage all feminists to be on the alert and to show solidarity with younger feminists. 'We all have the responsibility to make sure that #freethenipple does not turn against itself' (Visir.is, 27. March, 2015).

Feminists who posted photos of their breasts on Twitter, both young and older, did not express any regrets. To the contrary, their attitude was defiant, even jubilant, and they described how they felt the revolution had successfully given them their bodies' back, and therefore, patriarchy could not touch them. 'Because those who have those photos of me have no power over me anymore because I own my body' (Mbl.is, 29. March, 2015). 'If girls don't care whether other people see their nipples then they can't be intimidated with revenge porn. This is what the empowerment is about' (Knuz.is, 29. March, 2015).

Indeed, the women indicated that they refused to be shamed and some implied that those who used these photos for their pleasure were a bit pathetic. 'She finds it funny that there are some guys who jerk off over photos of her breasts' (Visir.is, 27. March, 2015).

Patriarchy is described as thriving through attitudes. Empowerment then requires that we change patriarchal mind-sets. In this respect, a recurrent concept in interviews with the activists was solidarity and using solidarity to change values and attitudes so that women can feel differently about themselves, especially about their bodies. This is in line with Hemmings (2012) description of affective solidarities. Indeed, what characterises many of the photos that were used to illustrate digital news about #freethenipple, was the sheer joy and excitement they portrayed. Those photos in themselves support Probyn's (2010) assertion that 'the body feels very different in shame than in enjoyment' and that by changing the affect from shame to enjoyment, the body's relation to other bodies or the social is reworked (p.74).

CONCLUSION

By taking part in #freethenipple young women not only indicated their unease and dissatisfaction with mainstream representations of femininity and body politics but also made their voices count in a space where they usually are not heard. We argue that by posting photos on Twitter and taking part in offline activities bare-breasted, they courted yet disrupted and exposed normative sexist discourses that define young femininity. In other words, they took the sexualized breast and the performance of sexual young femininity (McRobbie, 2008; Evans et al, 2010) out of the hegemonic hypersexual context (Griffin et al, 2012) that gives these practices their preferred meaning. This was newsworthy.

The discussion in the public media space was very fast paced and intense, and we think that this might have been further accentuated by the fact that Iceland is quite small. The factors

that might count as explanations for why public digital discussion about #freethenipple was relatively supportive were that many of the reporters were young women (and young men) who possibly empathized with the activists' cause. In that sense, the feminist counter-public had sympathetic representatives in the mainstream, digital public domain. The messages and discussions that filtered into the digital public domain could quite easily have been steered and represented in a way that discounted the young women's arguments or turned them into mere bodies.

The reactions from patriarchal institutions, such as the porn industry, brought no surprises and clearly showed how dangerous and risky female sexuality can be. However, there is strength in numbers and that may have made the women feel they were a force to reckon with. It is also important to bear in mind that the young women were, for the most part, a privileged group. That, in itself, made these actions less risky. There was not much engagement with the body politics of minority groups. As such, the revolution did not touch the lives of all young women.

We found it interesting how, for the most part, older generations of feminists in Iceland embraced this new revolution in public discussion. This finding is in contrast with recent research (e.g. Schuster, 2013) that sees a generational divide in terms of the use of new media and understanding of feminist political activism. In Iceland, older generations are well versed in the use of new media, i.e. younger and older feminists are more likely to occupy the same space. Despite being surprised by the action of the young feminists the older feminists found a common denominator in the young women's rhetoric such as the references to patriarchy. Patriarchy, they seemed to conclude, is a shapeshifter but so is feminism. Bearing in mind the extreme reactions from the porn industry, this support from older feminists is likely to have provided important affective and moral sustenance for the younger feminists. We asked ourselves what would have happened had the older feminists not stood by their younger sisters.

However, this is an area that needs further study and we appreciate that different research methods and data might have revealed more mixed feelings about the meaning of the young feminist activities among older feminists.

To address the question of whether the young women managed to be agents of change, it is important to outline the events that followed the #freethenipple protests. The affective solidarity witnessed in #freethenipple had a great ripple effect. For the remainder of the year, there were a series of feminist protests originated by young women. In May, there was the Beauty Tips revolution that consisted of young women stepping forth and sharing stories about sexual abuse and rape both on Facebook and Twitter. The Beauty Tips discussion led to the creation of the hashtag #outloud which operated both on Facebook and Twitter. In June the fifth SlutWalk took place in Reykjavík and approximately 9% of the Icelandic population attended (Kaaber, 2015). For a short time at least, #freethenipple opened up opportunities for feminist activism among young women and girls. The long-term effects of this development are yet to unfold.

The findings draw out the importance of acknowledging affect when studying the psychology of political movements and groups. The causes pushed forward by political movements must resonate with people's experiences in order for them to be drawn in psychologically. It was also obvious that the young women felt strongly about their feminist practices and that those could potentially help them form different relations to their bodies and their selves. Joining the movement opened up new opportunities for experiencing and expressing their selves and bodies, i.e. it may have been a psychological turning point.

This research raises a number of questions which would be interesting to explore further. Considering that the voices of the protesters and views are filtered by the interests and agenda of the various digital online news outlets and ezines that created the texts analysed, we would call for further research where the protesters are interviewed themselves along with older

feminists. Exploring the motives of reporters who write about feminist activism could also provide insightful and valuable knowledge about feminist activism.

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