

UCLA

InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies

Title

Stop Speaking For Us: Women-of-Color Bloggers, White Appropriation, and What Librarians Can Do About It

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5n06f2t3>

Journal

InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies, 8(1)

Author

Glassman, Julia

Publication Date

2012

DOI

10.5070/D481000820

Copyright Information

Copyright 2012 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

Introduction

In 1979, in response to the publication of *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, poet and theorist Audre Lorde wrote the following in an open letter to the book's author, Mary Daly. The letter criticized Daly's depiction of women of color as powerless victims lacking positive archetypes from which to draw strength:

As an African-american [*sic*] woman in white patriarchy, I am used to having my archetypal experience trivialized and ignored, but it is terribly painful to feel it being done by a woman whose knowledge so much touches my own. ...

So the question arises in my mind, Mary, do you ever really read the work of Black women? Did you ever read my words, or did you merely finger through them for quotations which you thought might valuably support an already conceived idea concerning some old and distorted connection between us? This is not a rhetorical question (1984a, p. 68).

Lorde's letter — to which Daly never responded — was neither the first nor the last instance in which a woman of color was forced to take a white feminist writer to task for abusing her work. Indeed, the history of American women's movements is fraught with, ironically enough, paternalism: a pervasive assumption, on the part of white women, that women of color (or low-income women, or other marginalized women) cannot speak for themselves. One of many modern corollaries to Lorde's letter is Fatemeh Fakhraie's "Open Letter to White Non-Muslim Western Feminists:"

Don't ignore the fighting we do for ourselves.

We can — and do — speak for ourselves. So stop speaking for us.

I notice a lot of condescension and arrogance when you talk to us or about us. Let me be clear: you do not know more about us than we know about ourselves, our religion, our cultures, our families, or the forces that shape our lives. You do not know what's best for us more than we do (As cited in Julie, 2008).

This assumption has been coupled with the suppression of writing by women of color — sometimes intentional, but far more often through indirect and even unconscious means. Murray (2001) speaks of "liberal appropriation" on the part of white women, which she describes as a process of "allow[ing] black women's writing to be fed through the cultural filter of white feminists' perceptions, and then to be marketed to largely white, middle-class audiences as diverting handbooks to black women's experience." Many women of color, especially LGBTQ ones, are told flat out by publishers that there is no market for

their work (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2008), and in 2008, when called out for its failure to seek and engage with writers of color, prominent feminist publisher Seal Press stated:

There's been a constant push to be more commercial, and we've responded to that. When it's try or die, I [Brook Warner, acquisitions editor] opt for trying. ... Seal is more mainstream than it's ever been. And for better or worse, this is what's allowed us to stay in existence (As cited in Lauredhel, 2008).

This assertion echoed the 1991 claims of Women's Press editor Naim Attallah that "sales were suffering as a result" of the writing of women of color (Pallister, as cited in Murray, 2001), thus implying that books by women of color are not commercially viable enough to be a worthwhile endeavor for feminist publishers, and that it is better to survive as a fulltime nonprofit organization¹ in a capitalist environment than to seek to enact true social change. Thus, women of color face two mutually-reinforcing obstacles when seeking venues for their work: first, a perception that they lack the expertise and wherewithal to speak intelligently about their own oppression, and secondly, a market bias against the very work that challenges that perception. Fortunately, women of color, having realized long ago that "autonomous publishing was the only way to create space for their voices" (Gumbs, 2008) have a rich history of circumventing this power structure through "autonomous... publishing practices" (Gumbs, 2008), producing books, zines, chapbooks, pamphlets, and other works. In more recent years, women of color have used the Internet as a platform for publication, enjoying "increased access to each other through blogs, listservs, and other web portals" (Gumbs, 2008). However, their work still routinely falls prey to the abuse described by Lorde, Fakhraie, and Murray; according to Gumbs, "Feminists of color receive barrages of racist and sexist threats daily and find their work co-opted by larger, mostly white mainstream feminist blogs" (2008).

While the listservs and "other web portals" described by Gumbs certainly warrant further study, this paper will focus on blogs authored by radical women of color. I will argue that because of the popularity of blogs among these women, the unique discussions occurring within them, the unstable nature of blogs, and a still-flourishing pattern of appropriation by white writers, libraries must make a concerted effort to collect and preserve these blogs. After reviewing the literature on alternative materials in libraries, particularly those materials with a racial or multicultural focus, I will use three case studies to demonstrate the types of discussions occurring in radical women-of-color blogs and their appropriation. Then, drawing on current practices within zine librarianship, I will make recommendations for public and academic librarians interested in curating blog collections.

Review of the Literature

For decades librarians have acknowledged the importance of collecting and preserving alternative materials,² although actual collections persist in collecting unacceptably low numbers of alternatives (Dilevko & Grewal, 1997; Marinko & Gerhard, 1998; LaFond, Van Ullen, & Irvine 2000). In 1982, Patricia Glass Schuman observed that, because “much of [alternative publishers’] publishing output arises from the need for activists to communicate with each other — rapidly,” mainstream publishers tend to lag behind their alternative counterparts in producing material on pertinent social issues. “If librarians are to collect and access information on issues that have the potential to change the fabric of our society,” Schuman states, “they must get it directly from those who are creating it.” In 1999, Anderson stated that alternatives can contribute to collection development policies based on “relevance to the experience and contribution of diverse populations” and “representation of a minority point of view” (as cited in Dilevko, 2008). These sentiments have been echoed countless times, by countless writers and practitioners. Most recently, Campbell (2004), Lilburn (2005), and Rickert (2011) have each made a case for collecting alternative news sources: Campbell gives an overview of the traits of alternative media, Lilburn addresses the problem of “common knowledge” through the lens of narratology, and Rickert provides a list of specific alternative publications.

Often, issues of race, diversity, or multiculturalism are implicit in the literature regarding alternatives; that is, publications dealing with race or produced by specific groups are included within larger discussions of marginalized points of view. However, some authors do focus explicitly on race. James Danky, one of the longstanding leaders in collecting alternatives, compiled a bibliography of African-American newspapers in 1998 and criticized the Miami-Dade Public Library’s exaggerated claims of a commitment to diversity and the absence of Haitian-American titles in OCLC (as cited in Dilevko, 2008). Heather Moorcroft (1996) has discussed libraries’ and archives’ complicity in “a self-serving forgetfulness that structures a pervasive silence in regard to certain information about Aborigines in Australian history.” She has also advocated, using a conceptual framework similar to Lilburn’s narratology, for collection development policies that allow libraries to become “sites for contested knowledges” about Aboriginality (1998). There is also some literature on collecting alternatives in the service of multicultural children’s books: Horning (1993), drawing from criticisms of large publishers by writers of color, describes the ways in which alternative presses “tell their own stories from their own perspectives for their own children,” and Agarwal (1999), in a survey of small children’s book publishers in India, claims that alternative publishers “produce books that break away from the longperpetuated [*sic*] stereotypes” and “take on

tasks that large commercial organizations are reluctant to pursue.”

However, there are several gaps in the literature on alternatives. First, it tends to focus on the ways in which mainstream materials exclude or lag behind marginalized voices like those of radical women of color; it does not often address the ways in which prominent voices absorb and distort marginalized ones. Furthermore, the literature often establishes a dichotomy between “alternative” and “mainstream” materials, ignoring the hierarchies and power structures *within* alternatives. Finally, although some attention has been paid to the need to establish practices for collecting and preserving blogs, as will be discussed below, much of the discussion around alternatives continues to focus on print publications like zines and small magazines, and the literature that does address digital alternatives tends to focus on larger websites like *The Huffington Post* or *AlterNet* — sites so large and widely read that they could arguably be considered mainstream.

The Case Studies: Immigration in Feminism, Radical Love, and the Kyriarchy

“Use without consent of the used is abuse.” – Audre Lorde (1984b, p. 58)

Methodology

Since 2007, I have been involved with the feminist and radical blogospheres: first as a reader, and, since 2008, as a writer at *Feministe, Alas, a Blog*, and other sites. Because of this involvement, I was able to observe the following three incidents as they unfolded, and when researching this article, I revisited archived blog posts and comment threads in order to reconstruct each sequence of events. Because each participant made their opinions explicit at the time, I did not feel a need to conduct interviews in addition to the data I gathered from the blogs. However, I did contact two of the key players in the incidents described in this study, to ask permission to write about their experiences and to send them each a draft of this paper: Brownfemipower (BFP) of brownfemipower.com (now flipfloppingjoy.com), a blog devoted to media justice and the writings of radical women of color, and Lisa Factora-Borchers, blogger at *My Ecdysis*. Although they did not critique the draft, they encouraged me to move forward with the article.

Immigration in Feminism

In a 2007 interview with ColorLines Magazine, Brownfemipower (BFP) spoke about her participation in a debate (on another feminist blog) on Afghan women and the imposition of the burqa. In addition to the cultural chauvinism

pervading the discussion, BFP was shocked by white women's refusal to acknowledge the viewpoints of women of color: "[White women] really didn't even care what women of color had to say. Like women of color don't really understand that they're being oppressed. They took away any work women of color have been doing for years" (as cited in De Leon, 2007).

BFP's incisive writing style and keen intellect was already earning her a place among the most influential radical writers in the US. In 2008 the *Utne Reader* named her one of "50 visionaries who are changing your world" and called her blog the "anchor" of a "pulsing women-of-color blogosphere" (Goetzman et al., 2008). It came as no surprise, then, that when writer and blogger Amanda Marcotte wrote an April 7, 2008 article for AlterNet.org entitled "Sexual Abuse Fueled by Immigration Language," her ideas strongly echoed the work of BFP and other women of color. In her article, Marcotte used a case in which a Colombian-American woman used her cell phone to record an immigration officer forcing her to perform oral sex as a jumping off point for larger issues of sexual violence toward immigrant women. In her article, Marcotte asserted that:

1) Immigration is a feminist issue and 2) The distinctions between "legal" and "illegal" immigrants is a red herring to distract from the fact that it's immigrants, full stop, who face oppression under a tidal wave of anti-immigration sentiment. ... Words like "illegals" dehumanize immigrants, whether or not they have their paperwork in order, and that dehumanization makes immigrant women juicy targets for assorted sexist oppressors, from anti-choicers to wife beaters to rapists, as this woman's story shows (2008a).

Marcotte's article raised several crucial points that are routinely suppressed in mainstream discussions of border security and "illegal" labor. Glaringly absent, though, was the citation of even a single immigrant or Latin@³ writer. BFP was among the first to respond, in an impassioned blog post:

There's **a lot of women of color (and men of color!)** who have talked about immigration. There's **a lot of women of color and men of color** who have examined how sexualized violence has been the foremost result of the "strengthening" of borders. **There's been a lot of us** who have insisted for a long time now that immigration is a feminist issue, goddamn it, get your head out of your ass... Which is why it was startling to read a recent article about how sexualized violence against immigrant women is directly linked to using dehumanizing terminology like "illegal alien" **without one attribute to any blogger of color, male or female**, in the entire essay. There is even an earnest declaration about how paperwork is the true problem of immigration (bureaucracy of paperwork⁴ anybody?) coupled with a declaration that

immigration is a feminist issue.

I do not accept that the author of this article made a mistake in **not publishing any links to the work already being done by pro-immigration bloggers**, nor do I accept that the author came up with these ideas all on her own (emphasis in original; 2008).

On April 8, another woman-of-color blogger, Problem Chylde, posted the full text of Marcotte's article on her own blog to demonstrate the ideas that Marcotte had taken from women of color. Almost every single sentence in the article was linked to a corresponding blog post on brownfemipower.com (2008).

The feminist blogosphere exploded with the controversy, which quickly bifurcated into two discussions: 1) analyses of the fact that "women of colour often have less access to the mainstream media or mainstream academia, making it harder for them to become known to a wide audience" (Gwen, 2008) and the implications of this situation when possible intellectual theft is involved; and 2) arguments over whether Marcotte had deliberately plagiarized BFP, or whether BFP and her readers were trying to sabotage Marcotte's writing career (Brownfemipower, 2008; Holly, 2008). Marcotte herself claimed in a comment thread on Feministe.us that "my views on this were mostly drawn from speakers I've seen at the NOW conference and the ACLU conference, but not BFP" (2008b). When pressed for more specific sources, she stated that one speaker who had particularly inspired her AlterNet article was Nina Perales of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (2008c). Marcotte failed to explain, however, why she hadn't cited Perales either.

In order to draw a distinction between plagiarism (the theft of distinct content created by individual from another individual) and appropriation (the synthesis of ideas from marginalized thinkers without engaging with them or acknowledging them as sources), Problem Chylde wrote an addendum to her post, stating that writing about the experiences of people of color without citing their work:

invisibilizes people who... have... authenticity and experience, who live those experiences, because they cannot impose a lens of detached whiteness that they did not have into their narratives. ...

THAT'S the sinister nature of appropriation. And in this instance, by not linking to anyone that inspired her viewpoint — forget BFP, even — Amanda tapped into this narrative that has been tapped into by countless folks online and offline (2008).

In order to demonstrate the systemic nature of the phenomenon, Holly, a blogger at *Feministe*, offered an anecdote of an instance in which she had unwittingly appropriated an idea put forth by another woman of color:

When she had proposed [her idea], it wasn't really listened to. When I translated it in my own way, further along in the conversation, everyone nodded. And I hadn't given her any credit, because it didn't even really occur to me; I had just synthesized her thoughts as good ideas and incorporated them into my overall picture. Although her idea had survived, her voice was lost... she's black and I'm Asian. Neither of us are white, but racism treats us very differently. This was undoubtedly part of why I was heard and she wasn't (2008).

And BFP herself wrote the following after suffering numerous personal attacks:

This was **NEVER ABOUT FUCKING BROWNFEMIPOWER except in the sense that I BELONG to immigrant communities and I BELONG to pro-immigration blogger community [sic] and I BELONG to the women of color community and I THOUGHT I belonged to a feminist community.**

This was about women of color constantly being written out of feminism, being written out of our own communities BY feminism... (emphasis hers; 2008).

Nevertheless, Marcotte and those who took her side remained unconvinced that race had played a part in Marcotte's failure to cite her sources, or that her behavior was demonstrative of structural problems within feminist circles. Three years later, Latoya Peterson of Racialicious.com reflected on this and similar incidents in her post "On Being Feminism's 'Ms. Nigga'":

It really isn't fun to dredge up all the things that went on, particularly as I'd rather not think about it for too long, but it is necessarily [sic] to do so. Because people forget. Time went on, and this thing I remember so well as a pivotal turning point in the feminist blogosphere is history. Digital dust (2011).

After discovering that her archives were receiving unwanted attention from those supporting Marcotte, BFP decided to take her blog offline and leave the feminist blogosphere. She eventually restored the blog, including the full archive, but rejected the use of the term "feminist" to describe her and her work. In her view, feminism had become synonymous with careerism and racism (Brownfemipower, 2008).⁵

Radical Love

Out of this aftermath, BFP and other writers continued to publish theory and commentary on their blogs. One theme they explored was radical love, a concept which is integral to much of grassroots activism and radical theory, but which defies easy definition. Although the "radical love" category on Flip Flopping Joy, the reincarnation of brownfemipower.com, contains posts dating back to December 2008, a March 16, 2009 post by Jessica Hoffmann sparked an

especially lively string of conversations about the definition of the concept, and whether it was even possible to define it:

Why do we do activism? Why do we engage in social-justice movement?

I think it is about love. I think it is about radically loving and being unable to accept violence, whether it is the violence of war or the violence of rape or the violence of poverty or the violence of displacement or ... (ellipsis in original; 2009).

In the comment thread, Maia, blogger at guerrillamamamedicine.wordpress.com responded that

when i think of radical love. i think of being a birth assistant for working poor african immigrant teenage moms. and loving them. even though i may not particularly like them...

and i think about working in the villages in palestine. and how there are these settlers coming to attack us internationals. and the palestinians are taking care of us. and we are taking care of them. and frankly i dont like everyone in that village either. but we are still putting our lives on the line for each other... we barely know each other. but we are living. and taking care of each other. because if we dont we are all screwed. does that make sense?

and it was in this village that i really learned what i now call: radical love (text formatting in original; 2009).

On April 3, in response to some disagreement over what radical love entailed and whether it was useful as a framework for organizing, BFP followed up with:

...I was very deliberate in choosing “radical love” as a concept to work with, I also am not exactly sure what the “solid” definition of “radical love” is. ...

What is this thing called “love”? And what does it mean to radicalize it? Is that possible? Is it desirable?

A full account of all the blog posts and comments that this conversation produced — let alone a full account of all the conversations about radical love that have occurred in the radical and feminist blogospheres — is beyond the scope of this paper. However, an August 9 post by I’Nasah C., in response to BFP’s post “Mamihood versus Mommyhood,” provides a useful summary of what is perhaps the closest we can come to a definition of radical love:

radical love

=

i am so deeply invested in your existence and your survival that i will do everything in my power to ensure that not only through [sic] you survive, you

thrive

... *regardless of whether or not i like you (at the time)* (emphasis in original; 2009).

On April 23, Jessica Valenti, blogger at Feministing.com, wrote a piece for *The American Prospect* entitled “Radicalizing Love.” The thesis of the article, which discussed Laura Kipnis’s book *Down with Love*, was that romantic love can be radicalized by resisting monogamy and the traditional trappings of marriage. The article contained no references to radical love as an organizing framework, nor did it mention the extensive discussions women of color and their allies were having in the blogosphere. The day the *Prospect* article came out, Valenti posted a link to it on Feministing.com, and when commenter Quix argued that Valenti was appropriating the work of women of color, posted a link to BFP’s response to the article,⁶ and asked Valenti to address it, her/his comment was deleted by Feministing moderators.

This case is not as cut and dry as the Marcotte case, mainly because the term “radical love” is not exclusive to radical women of color; a Google search reveals that it is also used on various Christian websites and serves as the name of a social media company. However, one can argue that Valenti, as a feminist blogger, had a responsibility to avoid using the term to conceptualize her and Kipnis’s ideas if she was familiar with the conversations happening elsewhere in the feminist blogosphere — and that if she was *not* familiar with those conversations, that she had a responsibility to read the work of women of color, especially since she had come under fire two years earlier for the publication of her book *Full Frontal Feminism*, which many bloggers criticized for, among other problems, its framing of middle- to upper-class whiteness as a universal feminist experience (Piny, 2007).

In any case, what is most illuminating about this incident, from a library and information science perspective, is the version of radical love *as a feminist concept* that debuted before a larger audience: a liberalized polemic against monogamy that bore little resemblance to its radical counterpart, penned by a white writer.

The Kyriarchy

The final case study I will examine revolves around another concept used by radical women of color as a framework for organizing: the kyriarchy. Coined by feminist theologian Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, the term “kyriarchy” is a reconceptualization of the term “patriarchy,” which has traditionally been used by feminists to describe a system of oppression in which men dominate women. The kyriarchy (from the Greek *kyrios*, meaning “lord” or “master”), on the other hand, is “a complex pyramidal system of intersecting multiplicative social structures of

superordination and subordination, of ruling and oppression” (as cited in Factora-Borchers, 2008). Lisa Factora-Borchers (2010), spurred by the controversies described above and the propensity of white feminists to “ignor[e] the lines of power and oppression between women” and “[act] as the authority on subject matter that clearly were out of their lines of experience,” introduced the term to the feminist blogosphere with a plain-language explanation:

When people talk about patriarchy and then it divulges into a complex conversation about the shifting circles of privilege, power, and domination -- they're talking about kyriarchy. When you talk about power assertion of a White woman over a Brown man, that's kyriarchy. When you talk about a Black man dominating a Brown womyn, that's kyriarchy. It's about the human tendency for everyone trying to take the role of lord/master within a pyramid. ...

And before you start making a checklist of who is at the top and bottom - here's my advice: don't bother. The pyramid shifts with context (2008).

The concept of the kyriarchy, with its apt description of the fluid networks of oppression that do not fit into a neat man/woman dichotomy, proved to be invaluable for women of color and other feminists, and quickly became a widely-used term within the blogosphere. Shortly after publishing her post, Factora-Borchers was contacted by a research assistant to author and scholar Shira Tarrant, who wished to discuss the term in her book *Men and Feminism*. Factora-Borchers gave her permission to be included in the book, and was credited with helping to popularize the term (Factora-Borchers, 2010).

On September 10, 2010, Nichi Hodgson of the *Guardian* wrote an article entitled “The patriarchy is dead... but the kyriarchy lives on,” in which she credited Fiorenza with its creation and proceeded to describe the term in plain language, much as Factora-Borchers had done two years earlier. However, in relaying it to a larger audience, Hodgson described the concept as a way to achieve “individual liberation” by giving “guys a chance to whinge about how they’re oppressed, too,” (Hodgson, 2010) rather than a tool for understanding that “it is in our nature to try and become ‘lord’ or ‘master’ in our communities, to exert a ‘power-over’ someone else” (Factora Borchers, 2010). Factora-Borchers, concerned at Hodgson’s distortion of the meaning of the term and her lack of acknowledgement that it was being used by other writers in feminist discourse, emailed Hodgson to ask where she had first come across it. Hodgson responded that she had read about the term in Tarrant’s book, and “offer[ed] a sincere apology if [Factora-Borchers] ‘felt plagiarized’” (Factora-Borchers, 2010). Hodgson then asked Factora-Borchers to provide her with a list of all work she had published in order to ensure proper citation in future articles (Factora-Borchers, 2010) — rather than offering to print a correction, or taking responsibility for performing comprehensive research in the future.

Of the 255 comments posted in response to the *Guardian* article, none mention Lisa Factora-Borchers, Shira Tarrant, or any of the radical bloggers who helped disseminate the term; indeed, one commenter even dismisses the term as the purview of “middle class academics” who ignore real-world problems in favor of abstract theory (AstridAgain, 2010). Once again, women of color were rendered invisible.

Analysis

Obviously, the issue of appropriation is a complicated one; when concepts are adopted by wide and diverse audiences, it can be difficult to ascertain when attribution is necessary. If the above cases were simply instances of plagiarism between authors of equal stature and with equal resources, they could and most likely would be resolved through legal action or other sanctions. Furthermore, in an information environment in which the expansion of copyright law has led to a “second enclosures movement” for intellectual property, one may understandably balk at the idea that a certain writer or group of writers should control the way information is disseminated.

Two factors, however, are crucial for understanding the above situations. First, these are not cases in which all writers involved have equal access to equal resources. The dearth of women of color’s voices in larger media means that white women are not held accountable to their sources of inspiration in the same way that, for example, a columnist for the *New York Times* would be held accountable for appropriating the ideas of a columnist for the *Washington Post*. Also, although large corporations or powerful individuals can challenge what they perceive as intellectual theft through litigation, poor and working-class bloggers may lack the time and money to do the same.

Second, and more important, appropriation perpetuates the perception, among white audiences, that women of color simply have nothing to say about oppression and liberation. Note, also, that these patterns reinforce normative uses of language; the choice by many bloggers to eschew punctuation and capitalization, or write in verse rather than prose, may lead readers to dismiss their ideas simply because those modes of expression are not often found in more mainstream publications.

The stakes in cases such as these are especially high when issues of access and preservation come into play. *AlterNet*, *The American Prospect*, and *The Guardian* can be found in a WorldCat search and enjoy full-time staffs, robust servers and internal archives, and indexing in major databases (although it is important to note that accessibility varies; while a search for “kyriarchy” and “Hodgson” produces no results in several major databases, a search for “kyriarchy” and “Factora-Borchers” in PsycINFO produces a review of *Men and Feminism* containing a link to Factora-Borchers’s original post).

Autonomous publications like blogs, on the other hand, are in a much more precarious position, as an entire blog can disappear with a lapsed domain subscription or a few mouse clicks. Furthermore, archiving tools like the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine are unreliable: the Machine is searchable only by URL (Chen, 2010; Ovadia, 2006; West, 2007), making subject, author, or keyword searches impossible. Even this problem is rendered moot, however, by the fact that the software used by blogging platforms such as Wordpress and Blogspot interferes with the Machine's ability to archive them at all (West, 2007). This means that not only are the original writings by women of color in danger of disappearing, but the debates and discussions surrounding the publication of articles like those discussed above can be rendered invisible as well.

These problems are not hypothetical. After moving her blog from brownfemipower.com to flipfloppingjoy.com, BFP imported some, but not all, of her archives before letting the subscription to brownfemipower.com expire.⁷ Any link to a post on brownfemipower.com, including the entirety of Problem Chylde's meticulously researched response to Marcotte's article, leads to an advertising page that has set up camp in the domain. Furthermore, two of the blog posts I cite in this paper — Fatemeh Fakhraie's "Open Letter" and Brook Warner's defense of Seal Press — are only accessible via excerpts and re-posts on other blogs. The originals no longer exist. Digital dust.

Establishing Blog Collections: Recommendations

In this section, I will offer concrete steps librarians can take to support the work of women of color. Although these issues pertain to a wide range of libraries, archives, and other institutions, I will focus here on public and academic libraries, where my own experience and expertise lie. Public (and academic) libraries are reflections of the communities they serve, and are charged with the task of granting their users access to a range of information that those users might not necessarily encounter on their own. Academic (and public) libraries serve as repositories of scholarly knowledge and research, and must provide users with as complete a picture of history as possible. Both types of libraries have a well-documented obligation to collect diverse and alternative points of view.

Zine librarianship offers a useful basis for collecting blogs authored by radical women of color, as the content and authors of zines and blogs are very similar. In fact, many bloggers, including BFP, are also zinesters. Jenna Freedman's 2006 article "Your zine tool: a DIY collection" contains useful tips on all stages of the zine collection process, from writing a proposal, deciding on a focus for the collection, and adopting appropriate acquisition strategies. Although Freedman sees a sizable difference between blogs and zines, her tips translate well into collecting blogs — although it is true that preservation of and access to

blogs presents a very different set of problems.

In addition to Freedman's advice, librarians looking to collect radical women-of-color blogs should keep the following points in mind:

1. Blogs should be treated as full-fledged intellectual and creative works, not as artifacts or curiosities.

Schuman advises against collecting alternative publications in special collections, arguing that "this sort of labeling can create barriers that an integrated approach would avoid. The alternative press is not an artifact; it is vital and important." Shore and Tsang (1982) echo this warning, stating that isolating autonomous publications "tends to stigmatize the material. It says to patrons that there is something inherently different about this stuff: be careful." Trusky (1995) curated an exhibition of zines at Boise State University — an admirable endeavor, especially considering the criticism he drew for the viewpoints represented in the zines — but his decision to display the zines in cases, rather than make them available to read, is troubling. The stakes are especially high in feminist collections, where such practices could actually perpetuate appropriation instead of disrupting it by separating blogs from "real" scholarship. In order to challenge perceptions of which writers produce work worth taking seriously, librarians must fully integrate radical women-of-color blogs into their collections.

2. Longevity and enduring access to blogs and their contents must be ensured.

Unfortunately, the current literature on the large-scale preservation of blogs contains more questions than answers. As stated, blogging software hinders efforts to archive blogs in the Wayback Machine. However, efforts by the Library of Congress Web Archives to collect and catalog Web content (Chen 2010; West 2007) may provide solutions to preserving individual blogs. Full-text databases may also prove to be a valuable tool in preserving and providing physical access to blog posts, and librarians should work with database vendors to select blogs for indexing. However, like zines, blogs are often very personal endeavors, and a blog should not be collected or indexed against the blogger's will. Thus, the following point is perhaps the most crucial:

3. Librarians should interact as much as possible with bloggers themselves.

Homna (2005) argues that despite efforts by librarians to diversify the field, public libraries are often "perceived as one of many Anglo institutions that are designed and controlled by Anglos to serve Anglos," and that overall, the profession continually falls short of any real interrogation of structural racism within its ranks. In "Babyfish Found its Librarian," radical zinester Andy

“Sunfrog” Smith (1995) recounts his blatant hostility toward libraries: “Giving our zine to a library... might have seemed antithetical to our purpose. What if the library gave our name to the cops? We should burn down the libraries, not be in them!” Regardless of whether one agrees with the above perspectives, one thing is certain: in order to build strong, ethically sound collections, librarians must establish relationships with bloggers, especially bloggers of color, based on trust and mutual respect.

These types of relationships are well-established among zine librarians. Basinsky (1995), in describing the process of collecting poetry zines, states that “meeting the poets is very important. ... Face-to-face meetings and conversations with poets and editors are a must when dealing with anti-authoritarian and anti-academic artists.” Basinsky also recommends personal correspondence with autonomous publishers, rather than “letters alone from institutions,” and Gissony and Freedman (2006) state that “as with any special collection, the more the librarian is part of the community, the more likely collectors will be to consider the library when cleaning out their shelves/guest rooms/attics.” Subscribing to blogs including those described above; participating (respectfully) in their comment threads; keeping track of blogrolls and links within posts; reading publications like *make/shift magazine* and the *Utne Reader*, which often reference blogs or publish essays by bloggers; and attending events like the Allied Media Conference (alliedmedia.org) are all good entryways into the world of women-of-color blogging. Being a part of these communities can help ensure that one’s work arises from solidarity with these writers, rather than a detached sense of charity. This need for solidarity is integral to my final point:

4. Changes must be deep and structural, not superficial or cosmetic.

One important element of the Marcotte case is the fact that the writer seemed to genuinely believe she was giving valuable aid to women of color. This belief made it all the more shocking to her when women of color reacted with anger instead of gratitude.⁸ The fact is that true anti-racist work requires white allies to face their own internalized racism; if such work seems to require only minor adjustments to a collection or little interaction with people of color, then it probably won’t lead to any significant changes. Honma suggests embracing the concept of “revolutionary multiculturalism,” which McLaren defines as “rebuilding the social order from the vantage point of the oppressed” (as cited in Honma, 2005).

Conclusion

The radical women-of-color blogosphere is home to some of the most

exciting and important anti-oppression theory being written today. Because, as a white woman, I run the risk of committing the very appropriation that I have described above, I must make it clear that any of the women of color I have cited can describe (and have described) their politics, theory, and experiences far better than I. It is my hope, though, that this paper will serve as one step in organizing coordinated efforts to collect and preserve these blogs. By collecting blogs alongside more mainstream publications, ensuring long-term access to them, maintaining relationships with the bloggers themselves, and working toward structural, rather than superficial, changes in collections, librarians can help combat the appropriation that keeps these voices on the margins.

Notes

¹ For a more in-depth critique of the nonprofit mode of activism, see *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Nonprofit Industrial Complex* by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence.

² The literature contains several overlapping definitions of alternative materials. For example, Anderson defines “progressive presses” as publications that give “voice to marginalized groups, emerging writers and poets, thought-provoking and sometimes thought-disturbing ideas, and translations of international writers” (as cited in Dilevko 2008) while Dilevko (2008) describes them as “those on the margins of accepted contemporary discourse.” Johnson (2009) defines “alternative literature” as “publications not part of the dominant culture and not sharing the perspectives and beliefs of that culture.”

³ The @ symbol is commonly used to denote both Latinos and Latinas as one group, and I adhere to this convention.

⁴ In the original post, the phrase “bureaucracy of paperwork” links to a post on *Alas, a Blog* analyzing the role of language in the immigration debate (<http://www.amptoons.com/blog/2008/03/19/illegals-illegal-aliens-illegal-immigrants-undocumented-immigrants/#comment-320502>).

⁵ In this essay, I will continue to use the word “feminist” to describe the work being done by women of color in general, as many of them still identify with the term and I lack an inclusive term for all writers with an anti-oppression, pro-woman agenda. It is my hope that this decision does not translate into disrespect for BFP’s preferences.

⁶ See “Oh, Dear, Here Come Teh [sic] Feminists!!!” (<http://flipfloppingjoy.com/2009/04/23/oh-dear-here-come-teh-feminists/>)

⁷ One must remember, of course, that bloggers may have compelling reasons for taking their archives offline, and archiving a blogger’s work against their will raises a whole new set of ethical questions.

⁸ See Marcotte's participation in the comment thread at "This has not been a good week for woman of color blogging" (<http://www.feministe.us/blog/archives/2008/04/10/this-has-not-been-a-good-week-for-woman-of-color-blogging/>).

References

- Agarwal, D. (1999). Small publishers in India. *Bookbird* 37(3), p. 6-7.
- AstridAgain (2010). Untitled comment. *The Guardian*. Retrieved June 5, 2011 from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/discussion/comment-permalink/7627906>
- Basinsky, M. (1995). Poetry zines. In Herrada, J. (Ed.), *Zines in libraries: a culture preserved*. *Serials Review* 21(2), 79-88.
- Brownfemipower (2008). Untitled blog post. *bfpfinal.wordpress.com*. Retrieved June 4, 2011 from <http://bfpfinal.wordpress.com/>.
- Brownfemipower (2009). "Radical love:" what is that? *Flip flopping joy*. Retrieved June 3, 2011 from <http://flipfloppingjoy.com/2009/04/03/radical-love-what-is-this-nonsense/>
- Campbell, B. (2004). Consider the alternatives: libraries and the media. *Feliciter* 5, p. 186-9.
- Chen, X. (2010). Blog archiving issues: a look at blogs on major events and popular blogs. *Internet Reference Services Quarterly* 15(1).
- De Leon, C.R. (2007). The segregated blogosphere: with more people of color blogging than ever before, race still gets pushed to the back. *ColorLines Magazine* 10(2), 36.
- Dilevko, J. & Grewal, K. (1997). A new approach to collection bias in academic libraries: the extent of corporate control in journal holdings. *Library & Information Science Research* 19(4), p. 359-85.
- Dilevko, J. (2008). An alternative vision of librarianship: James Danky and the sociocultural politics of collection development. *Library Trends* 56(3), 678-704.
- Factora-Borchers, L. (2008). Accepting kyriarchy, not apologies. *My Ecdysis*. Retrieved June 4, 2011 from <http://myecdysis.blogspot.com/2008/04/accepting-kyriarchy-not-apologies.html>
- Factora-Borchers, L. (2010). Truthout about kyriarchy: an open letter to "feminist" writers, bloggers, and journalists. *My Ecdysis*. Retrieved from <http://www.myeecdysis.com/2010/11/truthout-about-kyriarchy-an-open-letter-to-feminist-writers-bloggers-and-journalists/>
- Freedman, J. (2006, June 15). Your zine tool: a DIY collection. *Library Journal*, 36-38.
- Gisonny, K. & Freedman, J. (2006). Zines in libraries: how, what and

- why? *Collection Building* 25(1): 26-30.
- Goetzman, K., Hanus, J., Lewis, J., Lobel, H., Maestretti, D., & Ryan, E. (2008). 50 visionaries who are changing your world. *The Utne Reader*. Retrieved June 5, 2011, from <http://www.utne.com/2008-11-13/50-Visionaries-Who-Are-Changing-Your-World.aspx>
- Gumbs, A. P. (2008). "This instant and this triumph": women of color publishing. *American Book Review May-June 2008*: 4-5.
- Gwen (2008). Intellectual theft is still theft. *High on Rebellion*. Retrieved June 3, 2011 from <http://highonrebellion.wordpress.com/2008/04/09/intellectual-theft-is-still-theft/>
- Hodgson, N. (2010, September 10). The patriarchy is dead... but the kyriarchy lives on. *The Guardian*. Retrieved November 12, 2011 from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/sep/10/kyriarchy-and-patriarchy>
- Hoffmann, J. (2009). (Re)thinking walking: (Jess) what if the point is love? *Flip flopping joy*. Retrieved June 3, 2011, from <http://flipfloppingjoy.com/2009/03/16/rethinking-walking-jess-what-if-the-point-is-love/>
- Holly (2008). This has not been a good week for women of color blogging. *Feministe*. Retrieved June 3, 2011, from <http://www.feministe.us/blog/archives/2008/04/10/this-has-not-been-a-good-week-for-woman-of-color-blogging/>
- Honma, T. (2005). Trippin' over the color line: the invisibility of race in library and information studies. *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 1(2).
- Horning, K. T. (1993). The contributions of alternative press publishers to multicultural literature for children. *Library Trends* 41(3), p. 524-40.
- Johnson, P. (2009). *Fundamentals of Collection Development*. Chicago: American Library Association.
- Julie (2008). Privilege in Action. *Alas, a Blog*. Retrieved June 2, 2011, from <http://www.amptoons.com/blog/2008/10/21/privilege-in-action/>
- I'Nasah C. (2009). A.m. epiphany: radical love. *Drop the needle*. Retrieved June 3, 2011 from <http://so-treu.blogspot.com/2009/08/am-epiphany.html>
- LaFond, D.M., Van Ullen, M.K., & Irving, R.D. (2000). Diversity in collection development: comparing access strategies to alternative press periodicals. *College & Research Libraries* 61(2), p. 136-44.
- Lauredhel (2008). WOC 'engage best through negative discourse:' Seal Press. *Hoyden About Town*. Retrieved June 2, 2011, from <http://hoydenabouttown.com/20080410.1597/woc-engage-best-through-negative-discourse-seal-press/>
- Lilburn, J. (2005). Too much "official" truth? Mainstream media, the

- alternative press and the construction of common knowledge. *Simile* 5(4), n.p.
- Lorde, A. (1984a). An open letter to Mary Daly. *Sister Outsider*. New York, NY: Crossing Press.
- Lorde, A. (1984b). Uses of the erotic: the erotic as power. *Sister Outsider*. New York, NY: Crossing Press.
- Maia (2009). Untitled comment. *Flip flopping joy*. Retrieved June 3, 2011, from <http://flipfloppingjoy.com/2009/03/16/rethinking-walking-jess-what-if-the-point-is-love/#comment-2654>
- Marcotte, A. (2008a). Sexual abuse fueled by abusive immigration language. *AlterNet*. Retrieved June 3, 2011, from <http://www.alternet.org/reproductivejustice/81275/?page=entire>
- Marcotte, A. (2008b). Untitled comment. *Feministe*. Retrieved June 3, 2011 from <http://www.feministe.us/blog/archives/2008/04/10/this-has-not-been-a-good-week-for-woman-of-color-blogging/#comment-163374>
- Marcotte, A. (2008c). Untitled comment. *Feministe*. Retrieved June 3, 2011, from <http://www.feministe.us/blog/archives/2008/04/10/this-has-not-been-a-good-week-for-woman-of-color-blogging/#comment-163394>
- Marinko, R.A. & Gerhard, K.H. (1998). Representations of the alternative press in academic library collections. *College & Research Libraries* 59(4), p. 363-77.
- Moorcroft, H. (1996). The construction of silence. In Berman, S. and Danky, J. (Eds.), *Alternative Library Literature 1994-1995* (245-47). Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.
- Moorcroft, H. (1998). Libraries as sites for contested knowledges: collection development in the area of Aboriginal studies. In Berman, S. and Danky, J. (Eds.), *Alternative Library Literature 1996-1997* (191-95). Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.
- Murray, S. (2001). "Live authors. Live issues:" dilemmas of race and authenticity in feminist publishing. In Berman, S. and Danky, J. (Eds.), *Alternative Library Literature 1998-1999* (42-56). Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.
- Ovadia, S. (2006). The need to archive blog content. *The Serials Librarian* 51(1), 95-102.
- Peterson, L. (2011). On being feminism's 'Ms. Nigga.' *Racialicious*. Retrieved June 3, 2011, from <http://www.racialicious.com/2011/03/08/on-being-feminisms-ms-nigga/#more-13491>
- Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L. (2008). To hell with "there's no market for you:" queer writers of color and independent publishing. *make/shift Magazine Fall/Winter 2008/2009*.
- Piny (2007). Full frontal followup. *Feministe*. Retrieved June 4, 2011, from

- <http://www.feministe.us/blog/archives/2007/05/19/full-frontal-followup/>
Problem Chylde (2008). Don't hate; re-appropriate. *Problem chylde*. Retrieved June 3, 2011 from <http://problemchylde.wordpress.com/2008/04/08/dont-hate-appropriate/>
- Rickert, K. D. (2011). Media and democracy: resources for alternative news and information. *College and Research Library News* 72(1), p. 24-7.
- Schuman, P. G. (1982). Libraries and Alternatives. In Danky, J. & Shore, E. (Eds.), *Alternative Materials in Libraries* (1-5). Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press.
- Shore, E. & Tsang, D. (1982). Reference service for alternative publications. In Danky, J. & Shore, E. (Eds.), *Alternative Materials in Libraries* (67-83). Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press.
- Smith, A. "Sunfrog" (1995). Babyfish found its librarian. In Herrada, J. (Ed.), *Zines in libraries: a culture preserved*. *Serials Review* 21(2), 79-88.
- Trusky, T. (1995). In medias zines. In Herrada, J. (Ed.), *Zines in libraries: a culture preserved*. *Serials Review* 21(2), 79-88.
- Valenti, J. (2009, April 23). Radicalizing love. *The American Prospect*. Retrieved June 5, 2011 from http://prospect.org/cs/articles?article=radicalizing_love
- Valenti, J. (2009). Radicalizing love. *Feministing*. Retrieved June 4, 2011, from http://feministing.com/2009/04/23/quick_hit_radicalizing_love/
- West, J. (2007). Saving digital history. *Library Journal* 132, 2-6.

Author

Julia Glassman is a second-year master's student in the Department of Information Studies at UCLA. She would like to thank BFP and Lisa Factora-Borchers for allowing her to write about their experiences.