The Antigone Discourse: Zines and Blogs as Articulations of Young Women's Subjectivities

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Abstract

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Zines and blogs written by the young women in this study are an important form of inquiry that, if considered by educators, may push us to critically question discourses of young womanhood, questions of subjectivity, and the way we engage with texts. I use readings of Antigone to shape a reading of this discourse. I argue following Judith Butler (2000), that her act speaks to the loss of her particular brother, as well as the ungrievable losses resultant from her tragic family life. Her story invites us to question boundaries of public and private, and suggests a space between them that was inaccessible to Antigone. Similarly, young women who publicly articulate their stories in zines and blogs access a hybrid space, between public and private, where they conduct important subjectivity work. Through hermeneutic readings of these texts, I explore the ways in which their authors articulate the importance of hybrid spaces between public and private as where they can do this work. Like Antigone, whose action challenges binaries, young women who posit their personal stories in public reflect on the past in a way that suggests melancholia, or an unwillingness to part with the past completely as they moves toward the future. I conclude by arguing that when academics and educators approach these texts as hermeneutic readers, they engage in a critical process of understanding with these young women that invites consideration of new feminism articulated in these works.
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Dedication

For Bettye Rose Levy Pankewer, my grandmother, a feminist in my memory.
Chapter One

Of Emergent Adults and Ancient Heroines:

The Need for a New Discourse on Young Womanhood

Oh, oh, no! shout it out. I will hate you still worse
for silence—should you not proclaim it,
to everyone.

*Antigone* ll. 99-101 In D. Grene & R. A. Lattimore (Eds.), *Greek tragedies* (2nd ed.).
Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

If the subaltern still cannot speak, and the young non-subaltern no longer thinks she needs to
speak, then the loss of feminism is indeed palpable.


I. The Emergence of Emergent Adulthood

In August of 2010, the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* ran a story entitled “What Is It
About 20-Somethings?” with the subtitle “Why Are So Many People in Their 20s Taking So
Long to Grow Up?” (Henig, 2010). In the article, author Robin Marantz Henig described the
ways in which 20-somethings in the early 21st century seem to experience a protracted
adolescence. Experimenting with jobs and loves, articulating a sense of freedom and possibility
yet ambivalent about their roles in society, and often financially dependent on their parents, this
generation of young people, Henig noted, is struggling to get a foothold in the spaces that their
parents’ generation regards as constitutive of adulthood. She interviewed Jeffery Jensen Arnett, a
developmental psychologist who suggested a new life stage known as “emergent adulthood” to describe this ambiguous time and offers some description and analysis of his writings in her article.

In his work, Arnett (2000) argued that between the ages of 18 and 24, young people enter a stage of ambivalence and exploration. Through his research he found that emergent adults felt that they were somewhere between being grown-ups and young adults. Arnett’s echoes that of Kenneth Keniston (1971), who first suggested that a new life stage was emerging for young people of this age group, which he termed “youth.” Studying the zeitgeist of the 1960s, Keniston noticed that a growing number of young people articulated the sentiments that Arnett attributes to emergent adults. However, recently Arnett’s work struck a chord, and the category of emergent adulthood has become a source of both scholarly and popular interest, as evidenced by the growing number of citations of his work in other scholarly writings.

Both Arnett and Keniston acknowledged the limitations of their theories. Keniston studied a small minority of the population of young adults, and Arnett acknowledged that not everyone goes through the stage of emergent adulthood and that it is easier for those who come from a more resourced background to take advantage of this stage.¹ He conceded that emergent adulthood is culturally constructed and therefore not a stage that all young people must go through. However, he did argue that emergent adulthood is a new developmental stage. This claim, which has gained traction in the world of psychology and sociology, has begun to...

¹ Henig notes that according to John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation data from the Network on Transitions to Adulthood, American parents give ten percent of their incomes to children ages 18 to 21. Thus, children from wealthier background still have more funds, and often more cultural capital, upon which to draw during this period, which entrenches their advantages and the divide between wealthy and poor.
generate a discourse of emergent adulthood that warrants assessment within the humanities and
the field of education.

In her essay, Henig posed the question of why it should matter to the public whether
emergent adulthood, or youth, is a new life stage. She noted that whether it is in fact a life stage
or simply a zeitgeist that is repeating itself now as in the 1960s, it is important for us to consider
the ways in which society can support young people’s ability to explore and question during this
ambiguous time of life. A century ago, the concept of adolescence was new and controversial,
yet now within most industrialized cultures we acknowledge adolescence as a legitimate stage of
life through which most young people pass, and we provide some support for those moving
through this time of change. However, a multitude of hegemonic discourses of adolescence also
create repressive norms and suggest a monolithic developmental narrative (see, for example,
Lesko, 1996, Stevens et al, 2007). Like emergent adulthood, adolescence began as a category of
experience; it then became a life stage theorized by psychologists and later affirmed by biologists
and neurologists who studied the differences between the developing bodies and brains of
adolescents from those of adults and children. As adolescence became accepted as a legitimate
life stage, restrictive and prescriptive discourses of adolescence emerged. Discourses around
female adolescence became particularly restrictive.

Discourses of female adolescence are often based on scholarship that, though generated
from research on young women, nevertheless fails to engage with the voices of young women
themselves. As emergent adulthood is being theorized, it therefore seems important that

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2 I use the term *hegemonic* in the sense suggested by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) to refer to the conditions that make
it possible for people to consent to their own subordination. These discourses contribute to the conditions through
which young women consent to subordination to a more powerful collective.
educators and feminists who are well-informed about the lives of young women, as well as young women themselves, participate in this conversation to ensure that the resulting discourses around emergent adulthood are not similarly restrictive.

By examining the work of scholars of contemporary girls’ studies (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005; Driscoll, 2008; Harris, 2004; Hoskins, 2004; Mazzerella, 2005) and feminist research in cultural studies (McRobbie, 2004; Walkderdine, 1990; 2007), I will show in what follows that repressive discourses of female adolescence have become entrenched in our thinking about adolescent girls. These hegemonic discourses are characterized by three main assumptions that I will explore in detail in this chapter. A fixed notion of the subject, or a self that is fixed and internally determined, contributes to the rigidity of these discourses. Alternatively, I will advocate an account of subjectivity as an ongoing process. Such limited accounts of the subject generate linear narratives of development, and male narratives in particular. Linear narratives are problematized by the experiences of young women and girls that do not follow a linear path. These experiences are not counternarratives to the male experience; rather, they challenge the binary between dominant and counter narrative altogether. Additionally, the prevalence of post-feminism, or the notion that feminism is no longer necessary, also serves to limit the available discourses on female adolescence. As I will demonstrate in what follows, it is difficult for young women to articulate particular subjectivities or new feminisms within the restrictions of these discourses of adolescence. I will argue that the need for feminism is crucial, and that through personal writing young women conduct a form of inquiry that challenges post-feminism. These writing practices undertaken in their free time, outside of school or work are spaces of inquiry
where these hegemonic discourses are challenged and complex subjectivities are expressed and shaped.

This study will focus on zines (pronounced zeens) or personally published magazines, and blogs, or weblogs published on the Internet. Zining, or the writing of zines, is similar to the writing of political pamphlets, but was popularized by the do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos of punk rock culture. Zines are created through the ingenuity of their authors who need access to pens, paper and a photocopy machine (Duncombe, 2008; Green & Taormino, 1997). The practice of blogging began in the early days of the Internet, where people began to maintain personal web sites; thanks to innovations in free blogging software, anyone with an Internet connection can now blog (Boyd, 2007; Driscoll, 2008). Young women are prolific zinesters and bloggers, and undertake these practices in their free time, as they write, produce and publish their thoughts.

These works are particularly effective sites of inquiry because they are personally produced and self-reflexive, yet publicly published, allowing readers to engage with the texts. The zines and blogs I explore in this study are written by young women who have “aged out” of the category of adolescence, and are looking ahead to future adulthood, yet express ambiguity about this movement and often reflect on their past experiences as they look ahead toward the future. Their inquiry through zining and blogging is important feminist work. Although zinesters and bloggers may not label it as such, I will argue that the simultaneous project of working toward self-awareness and publicly articulating one’s subjectivity to an audience whose perception of young women may be altered by the challenges these stories pose to hegemonic discourses is a deeply feminist project.
In reading zines and blogs written by young women, I found myself thinking about another literary protagonist, Antigone, rendered by Sophocles in 441 BCE. Like the zinesters and bloggers in my study, Antigone struggled to represent herself within a public space. The outspoken daughter of an incestuous marriage who set out to bury her brother against the king’s edict and spoke out in public on behalf of the laws of the home, Antigone disrupted the status quo of Thebes and, like the zinesters and bloggers in this study, was also struggling with the movement from childhood to her future as an adult woman, as she was engaged to be married. Her incestuous parentage further complicated this movement, since her initial connection to her youth defied the cultural norms of her day, as did her behavior in the polis. Thus, Antigone, from every angle, was marginal. While the zinesters and bloggers in my study do not face the traumatic situation that caused Antigone’s public speech and untimely death, they are speaking in a manner that challenges hegemonic discourses of the female role of their day, using their personal experiences as evidence against those discourses, in much the same way that Antigone used her private act of burial and subsequent discussion of her act within the public space of Thebes.

In particular, the work of Judith Butler (1997, 2000) became central to my thoughts on the relationship between contemporary young women who write zines and blogs and Antigone. In *Antigone’s Claim*, Butler asserted that Antigone is “living the equivocation of social norms” (Butler 2000, p. 18), and I will show that zines and blogs written by contemporary young women often show that they too live this equivocation. Themes emerge in their writing that echo Antigone’s own struggle: the desire to speak publicly about matters of the family, the struggle for recognition, the often melancholic difficulty of leaving childhood behind for adult life.
Antigone acts in public, yet her act also explores her particularity within the context of her time. In what follows, I will explore the ways in which young women as authors of texts struggle to tell their personal stories in public, and I will argue that this practice is essential to their development as subjects.

In order to counter common discourses of young femininity, I will examine what I view as an emergent discourse on young womanhood through the dissertation, which I refer to as the Antigone discourse. My claim is not that young women are Antigones; rather, I will argue that reading Antigone helps us think about young womanhood. I will emphasize two critical themes in Antigone’s story. Antigone’s public mourning of her brother against the edict of her uncle and king, Creon, invite us to rethink the public-private distinction and the ways in which family and social life are enmeshed. Antigone’s mourning also provides the occasion to consider the ways in which growing up can be characterized as a melancholic process, during which we may be reluctant to leave our past behind in order to move forward toward the future. I will argue that themes can be found in texts written by young women today.

In short, I suggest that we need a new way of thinking about young womanhood, one that acknowledges that young women are engaged in forms of inquiry that contribute to their development of subjectivity. Specifically, I will examine self-reflexive publicly available texts that both invite consideration of the recognition that young women gain from their creation of these texts. While both zines and blogs are written in different media that have unique affordances, both are public expressions of one’s personal life; I will argue that through writing these texts, young women engage in inquiries that challenge prevalent discourses of female
adolescence, and therefore suggest that the experiences of emergent adults cannot be categorized in such a manner.

Reading *Antigone* helps frame the questions we should be asking in inquiry related to the formation of the subjectivity of young women. Central questions include: Do young women and girls succumb to prevailing/hegemonic discourses about their experiences? Do they merely replicate existing hegemonic structures of discourse, do they create counternarratives, or do their narratives defy this very binary? What tensions are explored within these works? And finally, how can we as educators approach these texts? Through a hermeneutic study of young women’s writings I will conduct a critical examination of persistent themes in the conversation about developing female subjectivities.

**II. Challenging Hegemonic Discourses of Girlhood**

*Subjectivities and Hegemonic Discourses*

In philosophy and psychology, the term “subject” is often used synonymously with “individual” or “person”. However, as Henriques et al (1998) pointed out in *Changing the Subject*, psychological theory often theorizes the subject as capable of constituting social contexts, rather than as constituted by and through them. As Blackman et al (2008) noted, Henriques et al, following Foucault, differentiated subjectivity from the individual: “The subject is discursive in that it is a textual position. It is not co-terminus with the person” (Blackman et al., 2008, p. 7). Their work was a foundational critique of psychological accounts of the subject, and was instrumental in generating the concept of subjectivity as a condition of being that includes both individuality and self-awareness. Henriques et al thus posited subjectivity as an
ongoing process, further complicated as it is contextualized in culture, or the social. Rather than a static concept of society, as a pre-ordained entity, they viewed the social as shaped by relationships. By combining psychoanalytic thought with Foucault’s rendering of subjectivity, they examined questions of agency and resistance as formative of subjectivity.

This work was influential within cultural studies and critical theory, both of which pay particular attention to the ways in which we experience ourselves as individuals in the world through our interactions within the public and political realms. This account erodes the distinction between the internal meanings, or personal meanings we make, and external, or ideological ones that are shaped by society. Historically, it has evolved into a discussion that is mindful of the ways in which subjects are formed through engagements with language, signs, and discourse (Blackman, Cromby, Hook, Papadopoulos, & Walkerdine, 2008). For my purposes, the relationship between subjectivity and discourse is crucial, as I claim that the discourses to which young women who zine and blog contribute impact their subjectivities as well as discourses about young womanhood in general. Henriques et al (1998) described every discourse as, “a practice of production which is at once material, discursive and complex, always inscribed in relation to other practices of production of discourse,” (p. 106). I share this view of discourse as both a product and productive.

Because discourse is productive in that it produces subject positions, the study of discourse can be used to learn more about how the producers of discourse conceive of their context, social environment, or culture (Blackman et al., 2008; Rose, 2001). Through the study of discourse, therefore also learn about the formation of subjectivities. One challenge of such work is the strong temptation to parse subjects from their context, or to claim a strong distinction
between or primacy of a subject’s internal meanings over meanings within their external contexts. In her work on video games and gender, Walkerdine (2007) discusses this challenge. She points out that the practice of meaning making through activities such as video gaming or media production by youth is frequently discussed within the literature of youth media studies while the meanings they brought with them to this process are seldom part of the story.

When we account for the making of the video game player we do not start with a clean slate. The meanings subjects make and the meanings in which subjects are inscribed need to be thought of as part of one and the same process. How might we begin to produce a more complex account, which does not result in this dichotomy between ideological and personal meanings? (Walkerdine, 2007, p. 10)

Here, Walkerdine advocates for a rereading of the practice of video gaming with an eye to both the subject positions that young people produce when they game and the discourses that they have brought with them, or that brought them to the game in the first place. When we make meaning, we are always already situated in a context. When young people are media creators (through blogging or zine writing) or manipulators (through gaming, per Walkerdine’s example) they are merging what they know about the hegemonic discourses with their own sensibilities. In other words, young women are at once producers and consumers of discourse. Discourse is not a skin that we molt. Rather, it is a palimpsest, and Walkerdine called on researchers to consider these layers rather than binarily opposing the personal and ideological.

This notion of subjectivity is crucial to maintain as a reader of zines and blogs. As I will discuss in detail Chapter Two, zinesters and bloggers rely on their audiences to contribute to their texts as readers. By producing such personal works, zinesters and bloggers seek recognition by their audience. The zinesters and bloggers in this study, through their writing express concerns about whether they will be read as subjects or viewed as “other” by their reader. I will
argue in what follows that these are feminist concerns. While women have traditionally been cast as other to the male subject, this status does not go unquestioned, but in questioning this status, one does not gain subjectivity. As Beauvoir pointed out, young women can accept the gendered role that is mapped out for them in the psychological drama, noting that a girl may “alienate oneself in a model...it is to play at being” (p. 51). However, as Spivak (1988) muses in her essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak,” the question of whether one can make an authentic statement from a subaltern position is a difficult one to answer. The examination of the speech of subalterns, in this case, young women, is an opportunity for inquiry into Spivak’s question on both the part of the authors and their readers. I will argue in what follows that readers can and should engage with texts written by young women in a manner that contributes to the feminist inquiry the authors set forth. The work of scholars of contemporary girls’ studies has made important contributions to this practice.

**Hegemonic Developmental Narratives**

The literature of contemporary girls’ studies, a relatively recent area of inquiry, offers a helpful critique of the linear narrative of development that fixed notion of the subject promote.

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3 Simone de Beauvoir (1989) highlighted the fact that a man is a self, and woman “is the Other, in a totality of which the two components are necessary to one another” (p. xxvi). The relationship of subject/object or self and other, derived from Hegel’s master/slave dialectic, is characterized by a dependence whereby the self needs the other to feel powerful and independent through the other’s submission. Although mutual recognition may upset this paradigm (for example, Benjamin, 1980), women are ultimately defined in male terms. Women, as the object counterpart in the dialectic, are merely “being,” while men, the masters and subjects of the dialectic, have the ability to transcend and attain a higher level of self-consciousness. Beauvoir’s critique of Hegel’s work and derivative accounts of subjectivity, hinged on the fact that because women are rendered as other, they lack the ability to act and are subject not to their own desires but to men’s. She explained that a girl makes an object of herself because she immediately senses her object status. A girl will feel a sense of shame at being “other” and develop psychological devices to deal with this, such as employing the desire for male affection as a substitute for her own ego; a girl does not get to *be* a subject.
Scholarship in this area is influenced by cultural studies, which brings matters of everyday life under academic study, often questioning and problematizing relations of power. Contemporary girls’ studies is influenced by the work of McRobbie (1990) and Walkerdine (1990, 2007), who both called cultural studies to task for focusing on the male subject. Both suggested that in order to study young women and girls, it is of critical importance to consider their everyday lives as constitutive of meaning making practices. Both also pose a challenge to the normative developmental narrative based on male experiences, which is challenged by their work as well as by contemporary girls’ studies.

The work of Walkerdine and McRobbie challenges the conception of the transition from girl to adult woman as a direct developmental path that all females follow regardless of race, class, and ethnicity. As Stevens et al (2007) note, narratives of development from child to adult often focus on the autonomous individual moving toward independence. This narrative was captured in developmental models posited by psychologists such at Kohlberg and Piaget who described stages of development that should be achieved by a particular age (Aapola et al, 2005). The relationship of age and stage is problematic because it creates normative standards that do not necessarily account for social and cultural biases inherent in their models (Lesko, 1996; Stevens et al, 2007). Feminists also critique these models for focusing on the lives and experiences of men and emphasizing autonomy and independence as the highest developmental achievements. While men were encouraged toward independence, women were encouraged to be submissive, which implied that they could never truly be adults.

The narrative of female identity has historically been articulated as one of dependence and being-for-others. While this trend is particularly pronounced in the work of Enlightenment
thinkers and often critiqued by feminist historians of philosophy (see Benhabib, 1996; Lloyd, 2002; Mills, 1996), some feminist work on women’s development claims this position as women’s strength. Psychologist Carol Gilligan (1982) and educational philosopher Nel Noddings (1984) posited an “ethic of care” as central to women’s mental development. For proponents of contemporary girls’ studies, being-for-others implies that women never reach adulthood, while boys grow into men through the process of seeking personal freedom and autonomy (see for example Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005; Harris, 2004; Hoskins, 2004; Mazzerella, 2005; McRobbie, 2004; and Walkerdine, 2007).

Although cultural studies scholarship attempted to deconstruct the notion of the singular psychological subject, early ethnographies often reified the hegemony of male experience and presented women as subordinate. Critiques of the traditional male narrative of development emerged in the late 1970s, as researchers investigated the tendencies of youth to resist traditional social roles and narratives. The now-classic analyses of youth subcultures by Paul Willis (Learning to Labour, 1977) and Dick Hebdige (Subculture: The Meaning of Style, 1979) are two such studies. Both investigated ways in which working class youth, primarily males, resisted the dominant culture of school and society through transgressive behaviors demonstrating their rejection of the mainstream that ranged from fashion choices to violence. Despite the fact that the youth depicted in both studies transgressed norms and identified themselves against the status

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4 Willis’s study described the ways in which the transgressions of working class boys against the regime of their school resulted in an inability to ascend within the class structure and a recapitulation of the lives their parents led within the working class. Despite their resistance of the dominant culture and transgression of its rules, these boys were unable to secure a better future. Willis’s findings are often cited as evidence of the power of hegemony in society; even though the boys attempt to define themselves against the norms of school, they do not gain social capital through their transgressive acts. The youth of Hebdige’s study were involved in punk music and fashion and were said to be creating oppositional identities of their own making.
quo, the result was not a gain in power. In the case of Willis’s “lads,” for example, the outcome of their transgressions of school rules was limited future opportunities, as his subtitle, *How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (Willis, 1977), indicated. Equally significant to the findings of these studies and crucial to the work of feminist scholars in the field were the ethnographies provided by Willis and Hebdige; both explored the ways in which youth create subcultural communities as they explore their subjectivity. The punks of Hebdige’s study created community in clubs that centered on the music and fashion of punk rock culture, which Hebdige asserted had particular repercussions for the dialogue on race and class in London during the mid-1970s. However, feminist critiques of these studies have suggested that neither work accounted for the role of gender within this process and both either overlooked or ignored the development of the female subject.

Angela McRobbie’s (1991) work with working class girls provided one such critique. She suggested that girl subcultures do not fit into the “classic” subcultural molds described by her male counterparts and posited two important critiques of these studies. She challenged Willis for ignoring the sexism inherent in the rebellion of the lads described in his work and noted that he paid little attention to distinctions between their public and private performances of identity. Of Hebdige’s work, she asserted that he overlooked or ignored the fact that subcultural bricoleurs such as punks draw on patriarchal meaning and noted that the subculture of punk is often premised on traditional gender roles. McRobbie found through her own research that female participants were not necessarily publicly or overtly rebellious and oppositional. Initially, she went so far as to question whether girls in subcultures actually resist at all (1991). However, her work clearly demonstrates that girls do resist, transgress, and take risks through their cultural
work in ways that challenge our concepts of public and private and our notions of female subjecitivity.

While McRobbie notes that the girls she studied tended not to rebel in public, her work suggests that they participated in culture at home by reading magazines targeted at teenage girls. Because the girls in her study were not allowed to go out and roam the streets like the punks in Hebdige’s work, they participated in culture from their bedrooms. McRobbie therefore notes that any study of young women must explore their domestic experiences in order to theorize at all about their cultural experiences and contributions to discourse. These practices blur the boundaries between public and private and call for an exploration of the extent to which a blurring of those boundaries has ramifications for the subjectivities explored in those spaces and the spaces themselves. The zinesters and bloggers in this study blur these boundaries in a manner similar to that which McRobbie describes. As they write zines and blogs in their homes, about their personal lives, and self-publish these works, they too contribute to public discourse.

An important site of participation for young women and girls is popular culture. Pop culture is often posited as a source of agency for women, and can be used as both an indicator of their fantasies and a consensus-building tool. Soap operas, for example, both exploit the housewife’s desire for glamour and create fan communities of women who are familiar with the ideologies of femininity and romance at play in the soaps (see Baym, 2000; Mulvey, 1989). McRobbie argues that teen magazines such as Jackie play a similar role for adolescents, in that they affirm an understanding of what it means to be female according to norms of feminine behavior. However, McRobbie suggests that Jackie’s readers are, when they come to the text, already aware of the language and codes of the discourse associated with the ideology of
femininity that the magazine purveys (1991). This is an important claim: like Walkerdine (2007), McRobbie’s work notes the interconnectedness of the meanings made by young people and those that they inhabit. Young women, through the simple act of living in this culture, are equipped with knowledge of hegemonic discourses of femininity, yet their own meaning making practices may serve to challenge, problematize or confirm these discourses.

While McRobbie found that girls knew the codes of teen magazines, the popular literature of the 1990s on female adolescence supported the notion that in fact the opposite was true. On the heels of McRobbie’s scholarly work, Mary Pipher’s pop-psychological New York Times bestseller, Reviving Ophelia, was published. Pipher claims that girls were at risk in a culture saturated with harmful media images. Referring to American society as a “girl poisoning culture” (Pipher, 1994, p. 12), she accuses that culture of silencing girls, pushing them to act out or in self-deprecating ways. Pipher’s claim that girls lose their sense of self at the onset of adolescence implies that this sense of self does not contain an understanding of the codes of femininity, of which McRobbie asserts girls are already aware, when they arrive at their teen years. This assumes a subjectivity based solely on internal ideas of self, one that is in contrast rather than in concert with social and cultural discourses, as discussed above. Moreover, Pipher’s work contributes to the discourse of post-feminism, which alternately asserts that feminism is either superfluous or harmful to contemporary women and girls.

Post-Feminist Discourses

The legacy of Pipher’s work became what Aapola et al. (2005) have termed “the Ophelia discourse.” The book had a powerful popular impact that provoked a wave of studies portraying
teen girls as alternately out of control and victimized by social pressures. These studies provided further fuel for the popular press, indicating that girls themselves were a social problem requiring a solution (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005; Harris, 2004; Mazzarella, 2005). Her work stirred media interest in girls’ activities as a subculture based on a “crisis” orientation. What is problematic about her scholarship is that it presumes that young women start out with agency or a coherent sense of themselves and then lose it somewhere. She suggests that one reason for this loss can be traced back to feminism.

The Ophelia discourse suggests that girls are in crisis because of feminism: its legacy created too many choices for young women and girls, who became paralyzed by the pressures of achievement (Aapola et al, 2005). Using the example of the film Bridget Jones’s Diary, a film that had massive appeal to both women and girls, McRobbie argues that feminism is made the ungainly foil of the modern working girl’s true desires. Relieved to live in a post-feminist world, she argues, Bridget must suffer the humiliations of trying to find a husband in spite of herself. Bridget is therefore duped by both the feminist and post-feminist tropes. Like a (stereo)typical feminist, she is a single career girl with her own apartment in London and plenty of friends with whom she makes witty and critical observations about men, yet she is only moderately interested in her work, obsessed with dieting, and longs for marriage in spite of herself. Bridget desperately wants to be married, despite her “commonsense” knowledge that she shouldn’t need a husband to be fulfilled; when she fantasizes about wedding bells upon meeting an eligible man, she

5 For example, Wiseman’s Queen Bees and Wannabes: A Parents’ Guide to Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and Other Realities of Adolescence (2002) depicts the cruelty of adolescent girls to one another, a perspective valorized by the successful Hollywood film Mean Girls. Articles in popular publications such as The New York Times validate the notion of girls at risk; for example, Jane Brody’s “Parents Can Bolster Girls’ Fragile Self-Esteem,” November 11, 1997, http://tinyurl.com/girls-self-esteem. For more examples, see Aapola et al., 2005.
immediately winces in self-disgust. McRobbie argues that the film is successful precisely because it articulates what she terms a “double entanglement” of feminism: Women in the post-feminist era cannot truly be happy because in order to be “good” they must forgo the fantasy of marriage, yet without feminism, the potential for change is lost. The feminist notion that women should have choices regarding their marital status is problematized by the fact that to be married is indeed still normative, according to the film. Therefore, the ability to choose is presented as problematic. Filmingoers identify with Bridget because she is caught in this entanglement. However, rather than explore this tension, the rhetoric of post feminism suggests that of course women can be single, but thanks to feminism, they can choose not to be.

Throughout this project, I take the position that feminism is primarily enabled by and instantiated through inquiry. McRobbie (1991) notes in her work on young feminisms that feminist research is similar to hermeneutic work in that it acknowledges the contexts and backgrounds of both the researcher and the researched, but does not assume that experiences are shared based on the category of gender. Rather than a static category, I agree with Butler (1997), who asserts that femininity is “an accomplishment, not a disposition” (p. 135); in other words, it is a performance, like gender. I regard feminism as a critical questioning of this performance and an interrogation of the causes of and positing of remedies to the oppression of women.

Instead of inquiry into the role of gender in the formation of subjects, post-feminism instead asks: why bother? The view that our foremothers have already fought the battles of feminism is prevalent among young women, as I will demonstrate in Chapters Five and Six through discussions of hegemonic discourses of young femininity. Thus, the rejection of feminism by young women is often described as a radical choice and inquiry into feminism is
seen as passé (Davies, 1989; Gonick, 2001; Kenway, Willis, Blackmore, & Rennie, 1998; McRobbie, 2004; Walkerdine, 1990).

Authors of zines and blogs within this study seldom refer to feminism or declare themselves to be feminist. However, by writing about their personal lives in a public forum, the inquiry they conduct is a feminist practice. Within their writings they are questioning, and conducting a form of inquiry that is feminist, in that it challenges hegemonic discourses with the realities of their everyday lives. As they make meaning of their own lives, these young women participate in the larger project of making meaning within a social context. This work affirms Walkerdine’s emphasis on the connection of personal and ideological meanings, since these young women present the personal within a public venue, where it contributes to a larger discourse.

McRobbie suggests that the cultural production of young women may constitute another discourse, pedagogic in nature but unique in its production of subjectivities that elude or challenge the hegemonic discourse. While these young women may not use the term “feminist” in their writing, their work’s questioning stance toward the status quo engages in a sort of feminist inquiry. In a study of young women writing a school magazine, Gonick (2001) notes that although they did not want to create a “feminist” magazine, the participants’ discussions of the magazines that they read, which she had initially assumed they were reading uncritically, “challenges the notion of an unambivalent acceptance of authoritative discourses on femininity” (Gonick 2001, p. 170). The young women who write personal zines and blogs are also in a position to explore their own ambivalence through the inquiry involved in their writing, and in so doing begin working on the double entanglement.
In order to make some sense of this double entanglement, McRobbie suggests looking to a reading of the ancient text *Antigone* given by Judith Butler (2000). She notes that Butler’s approach to the text acknowledged both Antigone’s action (her burial of her brother against the decree of the state) and her context (as the daughter of Oedipus and his own mother, Jocasta). Perhaps most significantly, Antigone’s action serves as a sort of questioning of the status quo as she asserts herself in the public sphere. Like Gonick’s students and, I will argue, zinesters and bloggers, Antigone problematizes the idea that young women unambivalently acceptance the status quo.

In the chapters that follow, I consider Antigone’s story and feminist readings of her plight alongside the zines and blogs written by contemporary young women, which presents some challenges. Political scientist Catherine Holland wonders of contemporary readings of *Antigone* whether “escorting this ancient heroine into the present” is a productive move, and cautioned that in doing so we may lose the distinctions she has from both her contemporaries and those who interpret her story as a feminist text through the process of explanations and recontextualization (Holland, 1998, p. 1115). In the description of my methods that follows in Chapter Two, I describe a hermeneutic reading practice that attempts to address this concern.
Chapter Two

Description of Methods

I. The Practice of Understanding through Hermeneutic Reading

My research engages a hermeneutic approach to zines and blogs. Hermeneutics, as defined by Paul Ricoeur (1981), is “the study of the operations of understanding in their relation to the understanding of texts” (p. 43). I approach understanding in this case as a verb, per Heidegger (1969), who asserts that through hermeneutic study we do understanding. In this sense, hermeneutic work is active; understanding it is the effort we put into the research process rather than a goal in itself. Hermeneutics is an engagement in this practice of understanding. The description of my methods that follows will describe the affordances of hermeneutics for philosophical inquiry generally and this study in particular. I will provide a hermeneutic definition of a text, discuss the significance of reading, and consider the importance of both the author and the reader of a text in the meaning-making process. I will then outline the procedure of my study, which incorporates zines and blogs as evidence to shape and support the Antigone discourse. Finally, I will present some challenges of hermeneutic work and the approaches I use to address them in my study.

Because I refer to the main data in my study as texts, it is important to clarify my sense of this term at the outset. In his work, Roland Barthes (1971) makes a distinction between a work and a text that is helpful when considering texts in a hermeneutic sense. He notes, “The work can be held in the hand, the text is held in language… the metaphor of text is that of network” (pp.
For Barthes, a text is not a physical object; rather, text must be held in understanding. This definition of text is particularly useful to my study, which examines writings of young women in two different media, zines, and blogs. If we take Barthes’ view, they differ as works, but I will argue that both are texts. As works, zines as noncommercial, small-circulation self-published magazines draw on the earliest practices of publishing; as self-published and self-distributed works, they share traits *qua* work with both the pamphlet and the chapbook. Blogs are informal online accounts of a person’s thoughts, opinions, and preferences that takes advantage of advances in online publishing and relies on an Internet platform for distribution.

While I assert that the zines and blogs I read share many traits at the level of content, theme, or design, what the two share hermeneutically speaking is readership. As publicly available works, they are both considered texts according to Barthes’ definition. However, as Barthes notes, neither can be a text without a reader. Melissa Freeman (2007) suggests that hermeneutics privileges neither the author nor the reader of a text; both make crucial contributions to the meaning-making process. However, implicit within hermeneutics is the fact that in order to be fully realized, a text must be read.

The necessity of the reader creates a temptation to overstate the importance of her role within hermeneutic work. To prevent such assumptions, consider Barthes’ metaphor of the

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6 For a more complete academic reading of zines, see Duncombe, S. (1997), *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (London, New York: Verso). Because zines are self-published and self-distributed, it is difficult to say whether young women’s participation in the medium is greater than or equal to that of men; however, researchers estimate that the participation of young women is high (see Starr, 1999, and Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004).

7 Freeman (2007) notes that other hermeneutic traditions emphasize the author’s intent in ascertaining the true meaning of a text, such as objectivist hermeneutics, which seeks to eliminate the prejudices of the reader completely from the meaning-making process. Critical hermeneutics offers still a different perspective, which suggests that ideology is present in both the author’s writing and the reader’s rendering of the text, and that both ideologies must be recognized toward creating a more empowering position from which authors may write and readers read.
network: he seems to be using the term in its simplest sense in order to denote the significance of connection. A text is formed in dialectic. From a hermeneutic perspective, just as the efforts of the author are crucial to a text, so too are the efforts of the reader who works at understanding. It is through the reader’s participation in the meaning-making process that this connection is made and a network is established. Within hermeneutic study, the reader also has a responsibility to the text as a participant in the process of meaning making. At the same time that a reader has the power to help actualize a text, she is also humbled through hermeneutics. Hermeneutic work consists of giving a reading of a text or texts, and again this language is significant. “A reading” is just that: one interpretation of a text that uses a particular theoretical framework through which to reconsider it (Walker & Chaplin, 1997, p. 118). While hermeneutic readings may gesture toward the truth of a text or artwork, they do so in a way that necessarily acknowledges the reader in context.

Hermeneutics emphasizes the importance of perception: What each individual brings to a text as a reader has significant implications for the hermeneutic project. Gadamer refers to a reader’s prejudice, referring to situatedness in relation to a text based on prior hermeneutic experience with other texts (1975). Similarly, the impact of our experiences and context upon any efforts of understanding is emphasized in Heidegger’s notion of fore-conception (1969). Freeman notes that both Heidegger and Gadamer’s renderings of the deep contextualization we bring to hermeneutic work “are understood as creating the intersubjective link necessary for engagement with the text,” (2007, p. 928). In other words, in acknowledging our contexts and preconceptions, we engage in a process of recognition with the author as we strive for intersubjectivity. Our engagement with and careful consideration of an author’s work, therefore,
is work done in service of a sort of recognition that makes a space for the author’s subjectivity, even if their intentions or meanings are intelligible to us in a limited fashion, through the lens of our own contingency.

All educational research conducted through human interaction faces these limitations, not just hermeneutic studies. Kincheloe and Tobin (2006) note that academics have a significant amount of baggage to declare at the outset of any journey into educational research.

When inquiry is conceptualized as a complex process, we begin to understand that research is not something employed by solitary negotiators operating on their own. Educational researchers use language developed by others, live in specific contexts with particular ways of being and ways of thinking about thinking, have access to some knowledges and not others, and live and operate in a circumstance shaped by particular dominant ideological perspectives. (Kincheloe and Tobin, 2006, p. 7)

Part of my project must therefore be an acknowledgement that the reading I give will be partial, biased, and contingent because it is rooted in my perception, which carries the baggage of my cultural context and experiences. Therefore, as I begin to describe my method, it is necessary for me to uncover some of the biases of the contingent and partial readings I shall provide.

The Author in Context

I have always been drawn to life writing. While the idea of a biography has never excited me as a reader, vignettes of autobiography have always held my attention. When I discovered zines in college I became immediately hooked on the genre known as perzines, or personal zines. As I read them, I felt a combination of voyeurism and the sensation of reading the most personal letter from a dear friend. I first found zines first in cafes and used bookstores in

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8 Multiple varieties of zines exist, in categories similar to for-profit magazines ranging from cooking to sadomasochism. Subgenres of the perzine also exist—for example, feminist and fat-positive zines. For more on zine subgenres, see Duncombe (2008) and Green and Taormino (1997).
Madison, Wisconsin and was reunited with them in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was not until I moved to New York that I discovered comic book shops and online distros where one could purchase zines; it was at this point that I discovered scholarship around zines as a prepolitical subculture (for example, Duncombe, 2008).

I did not consider blogs as potential spaces for life writing until I began to formulate this project. Antigone’s broaching of the public with the private seemed analogous in many ways to the work of female zinesters. Yet a significant amount of work that shapes the discourse of young people is formed online; even zinesters have created their own social networking site. Online spaces are just as real as life offline to young people who do not view real-life interactions as separate from those that occur online (Boyd 2008). A conversation may begin in the halls at school, move to text messaging, and end on Facebook. Pew Internet and American Life Project data indicate that young women are particularly prolific creators of online content: In 2007 nearly 55% of all content online was written by young women aged 17 to 25 (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, & MacGill, 2007). Therefore, in order to explore the Antigone discourse more fully, I theorized that the online writings of young women were an important source to consider.

Until I began this project, I only read blogs that crossed my path thanks to an emailed link or on the hunt for information, the answer to a question, or maybe a recipe. Some cursory exploration of blogs by young women, conducted in the method of search described below, led me to find that many young women blog about their thoughts and lives in much the same spirit.

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9 The site [www.wemakezines.ning.com](http://www.wemakezines.ning.com) is a social networking site for zinesters. It includes resources to distros, websites of interest, zinester profiles, resources for zine makers, events of interest, and so on.

10 Although this notion has become popularized through the scholarship on youth and technology, one of its earliest articulations was made by Victor Burgin (1996), who notes that young people’s view of reality includes the narratives of both their actual lives and the narratives they view on television. I will discuss this notion of hybrid spaces in Chapter Five.
as perzine writers. This finding, coupled with the prolific nature of their blogging, indicated that blogs would be important evidence in rethinking discourse about young women’s subjectivities.

In developing this project, method became a difficulty. How could I consider zines and blogs as partially constitutive of a shared discourse when each of them is produced and read in a different medium? Bloggers and zinesters have both insisted that each is a unique media that cannot be lumped together with other forms of writing or expression. The hermeneutic definition of text will allow me at least to face this challenge outright. This definition may also have interesting ramifications as I consider the role of media in the evolving discourse on young women.

While I discuss the limitations of this study in detail at the end of this chapter, in this discussion of my context as a researcher it should be mentioned that my status as an academic brings a degree of privilege. While it is the position of hermeneutics that all readings are partial and contingent, readings given by academics will necessarily receive a certain type of audience and a level of consideration that is perhaps more nuanced than those readings given in contexts with less access to resources and reputation. That I am bringing underground writings above ground in an academic study may be a cause for concern by some who consider such an academic project less than authentic. This is a true limitation of this project, one that I hope to address at least partially by approaching the texts with the sensitivity and delicacy of both a scholar and a fan of both zines and blogs. My hope is that exposing these genres to an audience of academics and educators will provide an impetus for my colleagues to take up their own

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11 In her work on zines, zinester and zine librarian Jenna Freedman (2005) has explored the distinction between blogs and zines. She has noted many distinctions between the genres, yet places them neither in opposition nor in total solidarity in content or function. Similarly ambiguous, Danah Boyd (2006) described blogging as a practice that is not precisely definable, yet cannot be compared to paid writing or journaling discretely.
practice of reading subcultural texts as a way to learn more about emergent youth discourses and subjectivities. Both those in a position to alter academic discourses on youth and those who influence curriculum design might thereby begin to question hegemonic discourses concerning young women and reconsider the importance of their participation in the development of that discourse.

II. Methods of Inquiry

My research engages several categories of works. Readings of *Antigone*, including my own, will help form the theoretical backbone of the Antigone discourse, and are discussed further in Chapter Two. In Chapter Three, I discuss the literature on adolescent subjectivities, as well as on zines and blogs, and Chapters Four and Five focus on the zines and blogs that I read for this study. Through my analysis, I found common themes in these zines and blogs. These themes represent questions that young women pose through their writing, and throughout the dissertation I will argue that zining and blogging are practices of inquiry.

I used 5 zines and 4 blogs as the primary data for the dissertation, each written by a different author. All blogs and zines were written by young women between the ages of 18 and 24. This age range represented a group moving from adolescence into emerging adulthood, and I hypothesized that their authors would describe their feelings about this movement in their writings. I used only texts that consist primarily of the author’s writing about her life and experiences. Although zines may be checked out from various zine collections in libraries and galleries, because of my prolonged and particular use of the texts and their low cost (usually between 50 cents and three dollars), I opted to purchase them. Zines can be purchased from
distros (online or mail-order facilities that specialize in zine distribution) or found in comic stores and independent book stores. I purchased all the zines used in this study from two online distros. Zines were selected based on the age appropriateness of the author (between 18 and 24 years old), the presence of a sustained zining practice by the zinester, and whether the zine is regarded as a perzine by the distro. All zinesters in the study had written at least three issues of the zine I used, which I confirmed through the distro.

I found the 4 blogs used in the study through a snowballing effect that began on the site Pickme.net. Blogger, the blogging tool now owned by Google, was developed in part by Meg Hourihan, who conducted early research on young women bloggers. Hourihan’s own blog is a resource, since she used it to solicit “girl bloggers” in the early 2000s. Although most of the links on Hourihan’s blog are dead, her site does list several hosting sites, including Pickme.net. Since many young people who attempt to monetize a hobby of web design by selling their work or offering web hosting use sites such as PickMe, young women who participate there often leave blog links on their profiles. PickMe also recently launched “PickMe Shout,” an RSS feed of PickMe participants’ blogs, which I used to find the blogs that were the starting point of my snowball search.

I also used links that bloggers provided on their blogs through blogrolls, or lists of links on blogs that the blogger reads. Some bloggers also have lists of affiliates, or bloggers with whom their blog is linked. Affiliation with a blog tends to connote a mutual relationship in which

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12 Some zinesters may also keep blogs. However, many zinesters are passionate about maintaining a distinction between zines and blogs. This project has helped me read that desire in a way that enhances my overall reading of the texts and description of the Antigone discourse.

13 For more information on the zines used in this study, see the Zinester Profiles section of Chapter Five and Appendix C.
both bloggers read and comment upon each other’s blogs. Hourihan’s own software, Blogger, allows its users to “follow” each other’s blogs. These networks of bloggers often comment on each others’ blogs and function as a community of bloggers. From these sources, I found a dozen blogs that I then narrowed down to a sample size of 4 based on the same criteria that I used for the zines, including the age of the authors, a primarily personal emphasis on content, and a prolific and persistent blogging practice. In order to ensure that the bloggers in the study had ongoing blogging practices, I only selected blogs that had been in use for at least six months and had at least 100 entries.

Prior to finalizing the sample set of 4 blogs and 5 zines, I conducted a pilot study to confirm the feasibility of the project and develop a set of codes I would use for both texts. In order to generate the codes, I considered a broad range of questions about the writing practices of young women:

- How do the authors reflect on the process of expression? What is the role of the public, the political, and the personal?
- How do the authors reflect upon the medium through which they express themselves? What do they hope to accomplish or gain through their work?
- How do they reflect on gender, body image, and sexuality?
- How are memories of the past or losses expressed? Is the author nostalgic, melancholic, or dismissive of the past?
- In what ways do the authors consider family ties, either with actual relatives or close communities?
I kept these questions in mind as I read the texts, and as I read generated a substantial list of codes (Appendix A). For the pilot, I read ten zines and approximately twelve entries each in seven blogs. After generating this large initial list, I re-read Antigone in order to generate keywords that represented my reading of the text, including melancholia, aporia, engagement with community, public/private distinction, and feminism. I then searched my large initial list of codes for these words, many of which appeared in the writings of the young women. However, there were also additional codes, or emergent codes, that I did not anticipate through my reading of Antigone that were prevalent in the large list. These codes included invisible audience (or fourth wall), particularity, hope, place, and space. I thus used the codes that I derived from Antigone as well as those that organically emerged from my reading of the zines and blogs to create my final coding list. I then I read and coded the 5 zines and at least 50 entries in each of the 4 blogs.

Based on my readings, I found that the young women in my study are engaging with these themes as questions within their writing, and that zines and blogs are themselves spaces for inquiry. I argue that inquiry as a public expression of personal questions is a feminist practice. Like Antigone, the young women in this study struggle to articulate these complex ideas through expressions of their particularity within a public forum.

III. Addressing Challenges and Limitations

Several limitations of my study exist that should be mentioned at the outset. I will address and respond to three in particular: the objection to academic study of subcultural texts, the
objection to hermeneutic study of these texts, and the objection to theoretical work posited as educational research capable of creating real change.

In beginning this chapter, I describe the category of emergent adulthood and note that the women within this study fall into this age range. In a study that attempts to challenge linear narratives of development, it could be argued that to study a particular category of young people might be contrary to my purposes. I selected this age group because, like Antigone, these young women are moving into adulthood and expressing ambivalence about this move and occupy a somewhat nebulous position in society. Additionally, by looking at emergent adults, an age group about which little has been written and theorized in comparison to existing categories such as childhood and adolescence, lessons may be learned about existing categories. Similarly, in exploring hegemonic discourses of adolescence, it may be possible to avoid recapitulating similar discourses with respect to emergent adults.

As mentioned above, the fact that I am an academic conducting inquiry into zines and blogs presents a difficulty. Because I am from a privileged group, it could be argued that my examination of these texts objectifies them. The issue of authenticity is a significant concern to those who critique the practice of bringing elements of popular culture—and especially objects of counterculture—under academic scrutiny. Some scholars have expressed concern that studying the semiotics of baseball or theorizing about MTV may serve to distance the subjects of study from the everyday and instead ensconce them in academic parlance, rendering them mere objects of study. In his work on zinesters, Duncombe (2008) uses the example of Time magazine’s coverage of a zinester’s work eliciting an annoyed and angry letter to the editor by the zinester himself, in which he refers to Time as an irrelevant publication. Part of the appeal of
writing zines, in Duncombe’s view, is that they are decidedly underground. They are printed at a copy shop rather than a publishing house. When the mainstream or an academic gets hold of this work, is it still underground, edgy, and “cool”?

This concern is valid, and one that I struggle with myself. When academics get their hands on what is cool, or *Time* magazine gets wind of it, that thing is generally no longer cool. However, unlike mainstream reporting on zines and blogs, this paper does not contain a corporate agenda, nor do I seek to make claims about individual zinesters and bloggers. Rather, the claims I will make have to do with *reading* zines and blogs. These claims are made by me, using a particular theoretical framework and containing the biases of my context as a reader. I am using the forum afforded to me as an academic to respond to their work as texts. The work of zinesters and bloggers is meant for public consumption and, as I argue, part of the appeal of that work is the recognition one will receive from an invisible audience, or an audience comprised of both known and unknown readers (Boyd, 2007). Zinesters and bloggers who are interested in academic responses to my work could certainly find this text, write about it, and even respond to me directly, as I am not difficult to find online through my professional affiliations and social networking sites.

Because this is a hermeneutic study, I am only reading zines and blogs and not conducting interviews with zinesters and bloggers. While this is a limitation that prevents triangulation of my data, it also prohibits me from making psychological claims about the zinesters and bloggers based on a composite look at interview transcripts and their writing. I view their zines and blogs as vignettes, not as complete narratives, and I recognize that just as they are partial accounts, so, too is my reading partial and in process. I come to these works as a
reader, and the data I collect will be used without obscuring that fact. In the example of the zinester who was angry about *Time*’s portrayal of his work, part of his complaint was that he knew that even if he were interviewed by the magazine, anything he said in the interview could be taken out of context and used for the magazine’s purposes. I share this anecdote not to suggest that one cannot quote writing out of context, but instead to assert that as much as a reader or interviewer may want to grasp the author’s true intention or meaning, our efforts at the practice of understanding are bound by the context we bring as readers. As I will discuss further in Chapter Five, Homi Bhabha (1994) noted that there is a third space of engagement where a reader and a writer may meet, both possessing subjectivity, where the ambivalence of the meaning-making process can remain. It is in this third space that I wish to practice understanding.

Further, little, if any, strictly hermeneutic work on zines and blogs has been conducted through a philosophical lens, while a large and growing body of interview-based research has been done in the social sciences and humanities (see Boyd, 2008; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004; Duncombe, 2008; Mazzarella, 2005; Scodari, 2005). This study will therefore contribute a unique perspective to this area of study, which asks questions about what it means to be a reader of texts such as zines and blogs. As someone who has never been a zinester and is not currently blogging about anything, I make no attempt to speak for either group with this study. I turn again to Barthes’ notion of a text, which requires a reader to actualize the text (Walker & Chaplin, 1997). As one reader of these texts, I am capable of offering an interpretation of texts, and in so doing I may be in a position to ask new and different questions about the act of reading these
texts than those asked by researchers who immerse themselves in the community. As a single reader, my data is surely speculative; however, I offer my readings not as monolithic, but rather as a starting point. It is my hope that educators and academics will also take up this sort of hermeneutic work in favor of challenging hegemonic discourses through what they learn from their readerships and incorporate that knowledge into their teaching practices. My concluding chapter will address ways in which educators may approach such texts in the context of their own teaching practices.

The question of whether and how interpretive research can bring about real change, particularly for marginalized groups such as women, is directly engaged by my project. Research on women and girls that is theoretical in nature, or that is based on qualitative work yet written for an academic audience, is often critiqued if it cannot be funneled back into the community of the study participants in the form of intervention. McRobbie counters that academic research on women and girls is inherently activist in its challenges to assumptions based on studies that engage primarily male participants. By approaching theoretical research as a form of activism, researchers may question the binary opposition of theory and practice through their own research.

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14 See, for example, Guzzetti and Gamboa (2004), who noted that the relationship between Ms. Guzzetti and the research participants had an impact on the nature of their study and its conclusions. However, they noted that this impact added something significant to their study that required further analysis and consideration. Their acknowledgement of this effect strikes me as very similar to the exercise of hermeneutic researchers acknowledging context throughout a project.

15 While McRobbie fundamentally agreed with this premise, she noted that often such efforts are difficult and impractical, not just out of inconvenience for the researcher, but because often the moment has passed to directly impact the lives of those particular women with such information, or the community is not interested in the direction the research has taken. McRobbie has adhered to the notion that the contribution to discourse that research with women and girls makes to the culture is critical and that the challenges it offers to misconceptions are still necessary and crucial today.
practices. Such a methodology invites challenges to binaries that exist within the content of research, as well as its context.

A movement exists in current thinking on qualitative research that advocates for interpretive research as an important counterpoint to the burgeoning trend toward replicable empirical “scientific” studies. Kincheloe and Tobin (2006) assert that in this political climate, it is critical that educational stakeholders have access to qualitative research that probes areas of knowledge where empirical studies cannot reach. Patti Lather (2004) also writes that qualitative study at its best is capable of refocusing educators to explore the ambiguity of experiences, showing us what we do not know rather than affirming certainties. Lather has encouraged researchers to engage in what Bourdieu calls “fieldwork in philosophy” (Bourdieu, cited in Lather, 2004, p. 23) by making such qualitative work part of the public dialogue on education. Kincheloe, Tobin, and Lather all argue that all knowledge is partial and all research is limited by the context in which it is conducted. Rather than advocating relativism, their view challenges researchers to approach research questions from a variety of vantage points. An important first step in generating this sort of data is recognizing the situatedness of a researcher’s own perspective, rather than trying to obliterate it by grasping at objectivity. As I engage in my hermeneutic project, I hope to contribute a vantage point to the field of research on young women’s subjectivities and to model a hermeneutic practice for educators and academics willing to engage with subcultural texts toward understanding the subjectivities of young women.

One area of for which qualitative research is particularly well suited is the exploration of points of connection between various discourses. The writings of the zinesters and bloggers in my study are writing about a stage in their lives that quantitative researchers are only just
beginning to investigate and portray in their writings. Through qualitative studies, and readings of texts in particular, important questions may be raised that quantitative data cannot solicit. As Lather noted, the importance of probing areas that seem ambiguous, unfamiliar or unexplored is work that qualitative research can engage in ways that quantitative studies cannot. In order to explore these new areas of inquiry, it is important to revisit established areas of study and discourses that may influence new work. Therefore, within my study, I examine not only the writings of young women, but also discourses of adolescence and young womanhood that have been much theorized and researched by qualitative and quantitative researchers alike. I undertake this work to set the stage for a discussion of the writings of young women who have been influenced by these discourses as the have come of age.

In addition to literature on adolescence and young womanhood, I have used *Antigone* as a point of departure for thinking about the ways in which young women publicly articulate their experiences of moving from childhood to adulthood. Antigone, an ancient female character who was facing many of the same life milestones, including the movement into adulthood, demonstrates that forays into public spaces that explore this transition are an important form of inquiry themselves. Therefore, Antigone’s story is not only instructive in that it supplies helpful themes to guide my readings of the zines and blogs, but as an inquiring young woman herself, her story bears important lessons for researchers who wish to engage with texts written by young women. In the next chapter, I will describe Antigone’s significance to this project, arguing that she is a young women who, like the zinesters and bloggers in my study, uses accounts of her own life in a public space to inquire into the nature of her future, and that readings of her story
provide helpful frameworks for thinking more generally about emergent discourses of young womanhood.
Chapter Three
Developing the Antigone Discourse

I. Introduction

Since Sophocles’ telling of her story, Antigone has been a figure of much contemplation within western philosophy and literature. Featuring themes such as desire, transgression, and betrayal, Antigone resonates across centuries and discourses. Antigone’s story began before she was born, when her father met her mother. Unbeknownst to Oedipus when he assumed the throne of Thebes and married Queen Jocasta, he was marrying his own mother. Following his discovery of this tragic mistake, he blinds himself and flees the city with his daughter, Antigone, as his guide. After her father’s death, she returns to Thebes, at which point Sophocles picks up her story. Antigone is the first written but chronologically last of Sophocles’ Theban plays. His tragedy explores the interplay of the obligations of kinship and the laws of the state and the complex ways in which they intertwine.

In Sophocles’ account, Antigone and Ismene, the two daughters of Oedipus, lose their two brothers to war—Eteocles battling for the city of Thebes and Polynoeice against it. As Greek religious custom dictates, the family must bury their kin to ensure their passage into the underworld. Women play an integral role in this process, as they prepare the body for burial and lament the loss of the loved one. However, Creon, uncle to Antigone and her siblings, and successor to the throne, dictates that burial is denied to those who fight against the state. Against

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16 For a more complete rendering of Oedipus’s story, see Sophocles’ Oedipus the King and Oedipus at Colonus.
his edict, Antigone carries out the rites over the body of Polyneices clandestinely. She entreats her sister to join her in this act, but Ismene refuses her, which serves to consolidate Antigone’s resolve to conduct the rites on her own. In undertaking this act, she enrages Creon, who also becomes more steadfast in his position against allowing the burial and commands soldiers to uncover and then guard the body of Polyneices. Antigone returns to cover her brother again, but is captured and presented to the king. After a confrontation over her defiance of his edict through adherence to religious law, Creon sentences Antigone to death. Antigone takes her own life, as does Creon’s son, Haemon, who is Antigone’s fiancé. Creon’s own wife also commits suicide, leaving him to mourn his own family.\textsuperscript{17} The play ends with Creon’s realization of all that he has lost through his indefatigable resolve.

In order to grasp the connections between Antigone’s story and contemporary young women, it is helpful to contextualize her story historically. Sophocles’ rendering of \textit{Antigone}, in 441 BCE, it was a re-telling of a well known but current tale of a young woman who enters the public sphere to uphold religious laws for the good of her family, in defiance of a royal decree. The audience would have understood Antigone’s need to cover her brother’s body, as practioners of the same religious rites themselves. However, they would have held similar scorn for Antigone, who did not heed the words of her uncle and king, for defying the edict of a royal and patriarch.

The complexities of the interplay between the public and private domains that \textit{Antigone} explores would also not be lost on an ancient audience. While the private sphere of the home is

often characterized as the domain of women (for example, Elshtain, 1982), as Holland (1998) noted of women in ancient Greece, the home may have been women’s domain, but it was also the property of men. Because of the marginal status of women, it would not be accurate to call the home women’s space. It would also not be accurate to characterize Antigone’s act as radical because it took place in public. Women often participated in religious rites, particularly burial ceremonies, publicly. Nevertheless, men dominated public life and political practices. Thus, while women were present in both spheres, they had little power in either. Yet, Antigone’s act and speech would have raised questions about the relationships between the two spheres for her contemporaries because they were so defiant.

Ancient Greek audiences also had an understanding of Antigone’s place in the life cycle. In Sophocles’ play, we find Antigone at a moment in her life when she is situated between the family of her birth and the family of her husband. She recently lost her brother and both her parents, and mourns these deaths as a daughter and sister. She is also engaged to Haemon and will soon be a member of his family. Thus, Antigone is not only displaced between public and private as a function of her gender, but also between adult womanhood and childhood, between the family of her past and that of her future. While Antigone’s age has been 18 Helene Foley (2001) describes mourning practices such as Antigone’s as “potentially revolutionary,” (p. 33) and notes the impact that funerals and burials were occasions where the public and private interests often merged. [See Helene Foley Female Acts in Tragedy, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001)]. David Cohen also (1989) notes that although women were relegated to the domestic sphere in ancient Greece, they still participated in a public social life. [See David Cohen, “Seclusion, Separation, and the Status of Women,” in Greece and Rome, 36, pp. 1-15.] However, Nicole Loraux argues that mourning publicly threatened civic order and such practices therefore took place within the home. [See Mothers in Mourning, trans. Corinne Pache (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).]

19 Foley notes that Antigone is a virgin daughter on the verge of marriage; this stage in her life is more significant than her numerical age, and signifies more to the audience. Her status has implications for her future, as she will soon leave her family of origin. It also compounds the duty she feels to bury her brother, as both are yet unmarried and share an important bond. For more on the brother-sister relationship as it relates to both kinship and incest, see George Steiner, Antigones (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).
postulated to be early adolescent, what is more significant here is the fact that she is on the precipice of a major life change. The experience of moving from one’s childhood family to one’s husband’s family was an extremely significant move in a young woman’s life in ancient Greece. Although the action of the play pivots on the burial of Polyneices, it also alludes to the inevitable loss of one’s childhood family that occurs through marriage. In Antigone’s case, this is further complicated by the fact that her family’s incestuous past makes their love for one another particularly taboo. Therefore, her struggle to mourn the loss of her brother represents more than this one loss and becomes, in part, an inquiry into whether and how she can move toward a happily married future in light of her past.

Antigone’s is a story about the struggle with issues of identity through the movement from childhood to adulthood. What makes her struggle particularly relevant to contemporary discussions of the negotiation of identity by young people is her use of public speech about her personal life as a part of this process. She engages with an audience in a way that invites questioning, and although her story is tragic one, it is useful in thinking about the ways in which public speech and actions are capable of destabilizing categories that we often assume to be static, such as childhood and adulthood, public and private. Like contemporary young people who are struggling to articulate their identities through personal writing through zines or blogs, Antigone’s act is particular, but also impacts the larger social discourse of her day. In what follows, I will explore the ways in which Antigone’s story is an inquiry that ultimately destabilizes the categories of public and private and adulthood and childhood.
II. Butler and Binaries

Central to my exploration of Antigone’s story is the work of Judith Butler. In her work, Butler challenges binaries toward positing that gender is performed based on social and cultural influences, rather than a set of two static categories (1990, 1997, 2000). In Antigone’s Claim (2000), Butler writes that she was drawn to the figure of Antigone as a potent example of a woman speaking out in defiance of the state. However, on closer analysis, she realized that Antigone’s story was one of crisis, based on Antigone’s family background and the tragic outcome of her story. Rather, for Butler, what Antigone came to represent was not political change through politics, but rather, “that political possibility that emerges when the limits to representation and representability are exposed,” (2000, p. 2). Antigone’s story, in other words, helps us think about moments when the discourses we rely on to make meaning seem inapplicable. As I argue in Chapter One, at this moment, hegemonic and repressive discourses of young womanhood prevail. Therefore, an examination of a story of a young woman who uses public speech about her own life, which defies social and cultural norms, as a form of inquiry into both her particularity as a young woman and into larger questions such as gender, kinship and the state, may help us rethink our own contemporary notions. In this first section, I will focus on rethinking the public private distinction.

In her reading of Antigone, Butler uses both a Lacanian and a Hegelian reading to shape her critique, which posits the importance of the entanglement of the realm of kinship with the realm of the social. Butler (2000) notes ambiguities in Hegel’s rendering of Antigone that undercut the concept of woman as absolute “other,” as she poses a disruption to this dualism. Hegel is often read as positing women as an absolute other. In order to affirm one’s subjectivity,
Hegel required that this subject be recognized by another subject, which places women in the position of limited subjectivity; in conceiving of themselves as the means toward the subjectivization of another, they do not flourish as subjects themselves.\(^\text{20}\) Antigone threatens this binary through her actions of speaking out as a particular consciousness in the public sphere, and can be read as forcing Creon into a struggle for mutual recognition.

Butler rejects the notion of women as absolute other, and instead emphasizes both the importance of the particularity of individuals and the role of the social in both the development and the expression of those particularities. She asserts that Antigone is a subject precisely because her actions speak to, and complicate, both her particular situation and the universal role of women to carry out burial rites. I agree with Butler that Antigone suggests the instability of categories. Her action does not merely highlight the extent to which women aid in the subjectivization of men; rather, it also underscores the degree to which all subject positions are determined through our relationships. Although critical of Beauvoir’s focus on the binary of the male as subject and female as other, Butler (1990) notes that what Beauvoir got right was the importance of contingency as a necessary condition of subjectivity. As Antigone’s past and present converge in the play, this influence of this contingency upon her as a subject who acts publicly is palpable.

Butler also engages with Lacanian readings of *Antigone*. According to Lacan, Antigone represents the limits of the symbolic order (Walsh, 1999); Butler builds on this view to suggest that Antigone is not merely a representative of the laws of kinship, as Hegel suggests, but rather represents the very instability of such categories as kinship and gender. This instability places

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\(^{20}\) For example, Beauvoir (1974) noted that woman is cast as a particular type of “other” in Hegel’s work.
our concepts of kinship and all relationships in a state of flux, so they are constantly being renegotiated. Thus, Butler’s perspective is characterized by a view of the subject as highly contingent and always in process.

Butler also urges the reader to consider the ways in which Antigone’s acts demonstrate an ambiguity. She views Antigone’s act as an intervention, arguing that she poses a challenge that suggests a radical alterity not bound easily to either the space of the divine or the human, but rather bound in the tension between the two. In moving between the polis and the oikos, Antigone highlights the importance of their interplay. As she brings her personal situation into the public sphere, even if it is on her brother’s behalf, she brings her own subjectivity to light within that realm. This action, as a contribution to public discourse, shapes the discursive space that exists between the public and private. Antigone’s challenging of the immediacy of ethical life destabilizes the sanctity of the two spaces in a way that blurs their boundaries. Rather than occupying either the space of the divine law or the human law, Antigone’s place is ambiguous. In the next section, I explore this ambiguity that ultimately questions the strict distinction between public and private spaces.

III. Antigone’s Inquiry

Readings of Antigone’s story have posited Antigone as either a heroine of the oikos or a heroine of the state, whose actions within the polis are cast as political. By essentializing Antigone, each stance ignores the fact that she does not fit neatly into either category. Her actions do not merely move her from the oikos to the polis; they bring into question the strict division between the two spheres (Mills, 1996, Ravven, 1996). In what follows, I will argue that
Antigone speaks on behalf of her family, which ultimately impacts the discourse of her day on women’s public participation. However, I do not posit Antigone as an intentional activist. Rather, I argue that by calling rigid distinctions into question, Antigone’s act, though particular, constitutes a form of inquiry into larger questions of gender, kinship and politics, and is therefore can be classified as feminist.

The terms “public” and “private” have accumulated many meanings across centuries, disciplines, and discourses. These terms are often left unexplained or unqualified or are equivocated about in much writing on political, social, and feminist theory. Classical renderings of the distinction between public and private often posit the two as interrelated opposites: the private sphere of family, and the public sphere of participation as a citizen. However, as discussed above, in ancient Greece, the public sphere, the polis or state, is a space where men can exercise their individuality, and the private or domestic sphere, emphasizes the welfare of the group. Men and women participate in both spheres, through religious ceremonies and family life; however, women’s role in the polis is rather limited and seldom political. Therefore, while her contemporaries would not view Antigone as a heroine per se, within the play, modern readers may find plenty of support for the claim that Antigone is a heroine, but an ambivalent one.

Antigone’s defiance echoes throughout the play. Her story begins as she asks her sister, Ismene, to join her in burying their brother Polynieces. Ismene refuses, but tells Antigone that she will keep her secret. Antigone is infuriated and retorts, “Dear god, shout it from the rooftops. I’ll hate you all the more for silence—tell the world!” (ll. 100-101, Fagles, p. 64). In this early

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21 For example, see Hannah’s Arendt’s discussion in *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958) and Nancy Fraser’s work on feminist concepts of the public “Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy,” in *Social Text*, (25/26, pp. 56-80).
exchange, it becomes clear that Antigone wants her act to be public, yet she carries it out in secret. Antigone knows that her act is forbidden and through her discussion with Ismene, and it is clear that both know the stakes involved in defiance. When she is caught, Creon asks if she heard the decree against burial rites for Polyneices. She retorts, “Well aware. How could I avoid it? It was public,” (ll. 467, Fagles, p. 81). It seems clear that Antigone made a conscious choice to defy his edict. This refutes depictions of Antigone as an unconscious actor, who blindly follows religious law. Rather, she takes Creon’s decree into account and decides that the laws of the gods supersedes it:

   Nor did I think your edict had such force  
   that you, a mere mortal, could override the gods,  
   the great unwritten, unshakable traditions.  
   They are alive, not just today or yesterday:  
   they live forever… (ll. 504-508, Fagles, p.82)

Here, Antigone accuses Creon of nothing less than hubris. She accuses him of overstepping his role as king by forbidding burial rites demanded by religious doctrine. Creon views Antigone as overstepping her role, and as I will discuss later in the chapter, he views her action as manly, which threatens his position of male power. With this speech, Antigone indicates that she made a choice to follow her religious duties rather than the Creon’s decree. Yet, this choice was influenced by the power of tradition, belief and her love of her family. This speech thus alludes to the interplay between duty and choice that is present throughout the play that Antigone and Creon are often said to represent.

\[22\] For discussion of Ismene’s role as a survivor, despite Antigone’s disavowal of her sisterhood, see Zizek (1989) and Steiner (1996).

\[23\] Helene Foley (2001) notes that Creon’s treatment of Antigone as someone who is capable of deliberately defying his edict suggests that he views her as capable of moral agency and therefore as somewhat male. Butler (2000) also notes that the two switch gender roles.
Antigone’s questioning stance is often overlooked, particularly in readings of her story that essentialize her as a heroine of either the polis or the state. In what follows, I will critique essentialized views of Antigone to support the claim that her action destabilizes both spheres by through questioning, which ultimately creates a discursive space between the two spheres. I will advocate for a view of Antigone’s act as ambiguous by considering her actions and speech as acts of inquiry. By acting out of both duty and choice, Antigone’s actions destabilize the strict binary between the two, as well as the public/private distinction.

Essentializing Antigone

When she is cast as a heroine of the oikos, Antigone is generally characterized as bringing the interest of the family to the public’s attention. Elshtain (1980) posits contemporary social feminists as “daughters of Antigone” and appropriates Antigone as representative of women’s ability to speak publicly about the concerns of the family. As “daughters of Antigone,” social feminists must—and this is an imperative; it is a duty—bring domestic interests to the public’s attention. The fact that women are bound by duty resonates with a description of women as immediate and natural actors, unburdened with reason, which men gain through activity in the public sphere. This designation also serves to associate women with children, who have not yet left the home and therefore have not developed this faculty.

Like Elshtain, Nelson Reddick (2004) also views Antigone as representing the importance of women speaking publicly on behalf of the family. He notes that 19th-century educators such as Emma Willard and Catherine Beecher used the values of the private sphere to make a case for the education of young women as teachers, arguing that they were better
equipped morally than men for the task of educating society’s children. These women left the private sphere of the home in order to speak out on its behalf. By working as educators, Reddick argues, Willard and Beecher brought the values of the private sphere to the public, as did Antigone.

This view of the private sphere is shaped in part by the classical rendering, but also shows the influence of the proliferation of Enlightenment ideas of equality that popularized our contemporary approach to the notion of society (Arendt, 1958). As the concept of society gained traction, so too did the idea that all people should behave as if they were part of one family, with everyone’s best interests in mind. The concept of society affected both the private and public spheres, and this “submersion of both in the sphere of the social” (Arendt, 1958, p. 69) had the effect of entwining public and private concerns. While the public sphere took on aspects of the private, the private sphere became in many ways less private, and subsequently a more common space. One result of this shift has been greater visibility of private concerns within the public realm. However, the question of whether this is a truly liberatory practice for women must be raised.

The gendered impact of this shift is visible in Elshtain and Reddick’s readings of Antigone, since both posit her as bringing aspects of the private to the public’s attention. Reddick subscribes to Elshtain’s theory of social feminism as liberatory for women in certain contexts, asserting that women have historically been society’s foremost moral agents and are therefore best equipped to teach morality to future citizens. However, unlike Elshtain, he notes that this assumption reinforced gender stereotypes at the same moment that it challenged them. To act in public, Antigone must reckon with her own subjectivity. Elshtain termed woman
“identity-in-becoming” (Elshtain, 1980, p. 53), as achieving identity through action, but conceded that their public speech is given on behalf of others. Because they enter the public only to advocate for the interests of the private sphere, feminists such as Beauvoir might argue that they are still trapped in the domestic sphere. By participating in public life as the agents of others, the “American Antigones” are still primarily focused on the subjectivity of others rather than themselves.

Reddick, however, raises a critical point: He argues that Antigone is not completely conscious of the contradictions implicit in her actions; likewise, neither are Beecher and Willard.24 Antigone lacks awareness of the significance of her actions, and although she views the burial of her brother as a crucial act, she does not see the degree to which it is entangled in the larger issue of the interplay between the public and the private, duty and choice. While Reddick viewed Antigone as unconscious of the larger import of her action, Butler (2000) views Antigone as unaware of the impact her actions have upon her particularity as a member of her family and society. In both cases, the fact that Antigone acts without full comprehension of the significance of her actions is significant. Antigone’s naïve insertions within the public sphere call into question not only her particular issues, but also the very conditions that make her assertions so controversial. Therefore, her public participation is an occasion to consider how particular stories impact the public spaces where they are shared.

24 Reddick’s work, more so than Elshtain, acknowledged the paradox in Antigone’s actions. However, even Reddick’s account used Antigone as a metaphor through which historical feminists could reclaim the private sphere for public uses, which ultimately posits women who choose this path as tragic spinsters. Noting that Beecher and Willard remained unmarried, he asserted that they are therefore “married” to their cause, sacrificing their family lives toward the betterment of the community. Reddick may have posited this inversion of Hegel’s point that women relinquish themselves in favor of men’s ascent toward spirit as a feminist conceit of women sacrificing family life in favor of a career; yet implicit in this argument is the idea that women cannot truly “have it all” and inhabit both the private and the public spheres.
By claiming Antigone as a heroine of the oikos, women are attributed the ability to act ethically but are not ethical beings for themselves, only beings for others; it follows that women act out of duty and not choice. However, Antigone’s act challenges this perception, demonstrating that by articulating one’s particularity in a public space is a powerful form of inquiry, whether it is intended to be activist or not. Antigone’s challenge to Creon demonstrates a struggle with duty and choice, and indicates that she is not merely a representative of the private sphere. Rather, through her act provokes consideration of what lies between public and private.

Other feminists read Antigone’s act as explicitly political, and therefore rooted in the interests of the polis. While views of Antigone as a heroine of the oikos focus on the nature of her duty to act, those that claim her as a heroine of the polis focus on her action as a choice. If Antigone chooses to bury her brother, this means that she knowingly acts in a manner contrary to the decree made by Creon against it. Within the polis, men exercise choice toward developing reason; feminist claims that Antigone is acting as a member of the polis assert that she is exercising this type of choice. That this line of argument places an emphasis on the importance of reason as a criterion for subjectivity can be seen through this emphasis on the importance of rational choice.

Mary Dietz (1985), perhaps Elshtain’s most vehement critic, essentializes Antigone as a heroine of the polis by empowering her with citizenship. She holds social feminism in contempt for marginalizing women’s roles as citizens. For Dietz, all choices are political ones; we are all politically determined, and politics at its best is an equalizing factor among citizens, unlike family relationships, which are imbued with emotion and power. For Dietz, the cultivation of citizenship makes one a subject; therefore, positing Antigone as a citizen was central to her
argument. In order to claim Antigone’s citizenship, Dietz offers a reading of the play in which Antigone and Creon represent two different political views: a collective way of life and a nation-state, respectively. In emphasizing the importance of the political as a space for discourse and participation around matters both public and private, Dietz deemphasizes the role of the private sphere in Antigone’s act to the point of rendering it merely symbolic. Further, she emphasizes Antigone as a rational actor capable of choice, unlike Elshtain and Reddick, who describe Antigone as acting out of duty. Implicit in her position was the notion that Antigone is a rational adult who chooses to act as a citizen.

Feminist readings of Antigone are capable of reenvisioning the public sphere by reviewing Antigone’s actions as a challenge to the binary between the public and private; however, it is important to note that our contemporary concept of the public is already under the influence of these many renderings. Deitz’s critique, though grounded in an Aristotelian vision of the political, gestured toward the concept of civil society in its claim that Antigone’s act is rooted in the power of citizenship. During the same period during which Arendt theorized the more privative public, Marxists, feminists, and scholars of critical theory noted that the rise of society creates a third space where our consent is sought as to what exactly comprises everyone’s best interests. Civil society, comprised of clubs, churches, citizens’ groups, and the press, make up this arena, distinct from the state and the home (McRobbie, 1991; Ravven, 1996). As Habermas (1990) points out, in Marx’s conception, civil society is a device through which the state monologues to “the public” qua mass society. This communication facilitates consent while keeping the public informed, but there is limited dialogue between the public and the state. While consent is being sought within this in-between space, those with less power could
potentially organize toward political change. Habermas noted, however, that this system of supposed checks and balances fails in bourgeois society because it does not account for the differentials in power among members of the public (Habermas, 1989, in Fraser, 1990).

To further complicate matters, the boundaries of civil society vary across renderings. Gramsci (1994), for example, includes the family as a site of action within civil society and noted that our consent is sought within that space to accept various ideologies (see also Althusser, 1971). Within feminist discourses, civil society has often been called “the public,” an equivocation that Nancy Fraser describes as furthering confusion around the concept of publics, particularly within feminist literature. She noted that within feminist theory the phrase “the public sphere” may refer to “the state, the official economy of paid employment, and arenas of public discourse” (Fraser, 1990, p. 57).

While civil society did not exist during Antigone’s time, the concept gestures toward themes that emerge through Antigone’s action. As a space of consent, civil society is a shared space where public discourse occurs in order to shape political and social beliefs, but this discourse is influenced by private and community concerns. By articulating her private concerns in the polis, Antigone brings her particular concerns to bear in public and thus alters the public sphere. Antigone’s story challenges us to consider the ways in which the public sphere was already discursive in this way, and constitutive of both the norms that made Antigone’s behavior remarkable both as a challenge to the division of the two spheres and as a challenge to her own understanding of the meaning of her actions.

Dietz’s work was influenced by the notion of civil society, as she cast Antigone as a citizen who is advocating a society that functions as a collective, giving each citizen a voice.
Central to her argument was the notion that Antigone is a citizen foremost, but she is also a
daughter, niece, and sister. I agree with Dietz’s vision of Antigone as a complex subject;
however, my objection to Dietz is that she, like Elshtain, reads Antigone as governed primarily
by a singular force—in Dietz’s case, that of political interests. My reading of Antigone goes
beyond Dietz’s suggestion that Antigone occupies multiple roles that impact the young woman’s
actions to suggest that Antigone occupies these roles and does not completely grasp the ways in
which they impact her actions.

Like Elshtain, Dietz claims Antigone as particular kind of heroine, situating her squarely
in the political arena. Various critiques from within the field have noted that both Dietz and
Elshtain attempt to reclaim the story of Antigone, using elements from the discourse of political
science that were provided for them, rather than using Antigone to question or problematize that
discourse (Holland, 1992; Zerelli, 1991). The rigidity of both positions seems out of step with the
text itself; as Holland points out, the possibility for ambiguity is denied when such a structure is
imposed on an ancient text. In a sense, both Elshtain and Dietz are right: Young women can
certainly enter the public to speak out on behalf of the family, and they can engage in citizen
activism. However, the question that must be asked is whether Antigone can be read as doing
either of these things with intent. Rather than making her an activist from either sphere,
Antigone’s action calls into question the very rigidity of these two spheres. Approaching
Antigone’s act as ambiguous rather than a statement of loyalty to either sphere suggests that her
act is an inquiry through which she explores the interplay between duty and choice.

Many feminist interpretations have noted that Sophocles’ rendering of her story preserves
the ambiguity of her actions (Butler, 2000; Nussbaum 1986). Rather than holding Antigone as a
heroine of the polis or the oikos and focusing on her as a symbolic character, scholars such as Butler and Nussbaum suggest that examining Antigone’s actions allows us more insight into the significance of her story. As Butler (2000) remarks, “The deed itself seems to wander throughout the play” (p. 7), as it is discussed, debated and interpreted by all the play’s characters. Antigone’s action and the resulting tension with Creon serve to destabilize the binaries of public and private, as well as the tension between conscious choice and the immediacy of duty.

As we have seen, the binary of duty and choice is depicted through the characters of Antigone and Creon, with Antigone representing the duty of the private sphere and Creon representing the public realm of choice. Some feminist critics such as Mills (1996) suggest that Antigone defies her role and becomes an activist from the private sphere when she speaks out in public. Mills sees this action as a conscious choice on Antigone’s part, contrary to Hegel’s rendering, which depicts her actions as immediate and bound by duty. Mills views Antigone as an activist who breaks the law to highlight the particularity of her situation; by burying her brother in public she draws attention to the fact of his unjust death and her righteous mourning of this loss. The significance of the burial of this particular brother through her particular act is crucial to this position. Through the expression of these particularities, Antigone becomes a subject for Mills.

Butler (2000) and Nussbaum (1996) hold a differing view and demonstrate that whether Antigone is a self-conscious actor or not, her action is a crucial statement of her struggle for subjectivity. Both recognize that Antigone and Creon are engaged in a conflict that encompasses the tensions between the laws of the state and the domestic sphere, as characterized by their positions within each realm, in addition to the layer of complexity that their own familial
relationship adds. Rather than viewing the two realms as antagonistic, as Mills does, Nussbaum notes that they share a “tunnel vision”: Each is completely unwilling or unable to see the position of the other. For Nussbaum, this tunnel vision has consequences that impact the ways in which each views the role of the individual within the community.

Butler (2000) went further, asserting that Antigone and Creon are mirror images of one another but that each occupies the position of the other through his or her actions. Referring to Antigone’s burial of her brother and Creon’s public opposition to it, she states, “The two acts mirror rather than oppose one another; suggesting that if one represents kinship and the other the state, they can perform this representation only by each becoming implicated in the idiom of the other” (Butler, 2000, p. 10). Antigone becomes manly through her action in the polis; Creon is less manly through his dealings with her. Creon goes so far as to say that he will be “unmanned” if Antigone is not found guilty of her crime:

This girl was an old hand at insolence
when she overrode the edicts we made public.
But once she had done it—the insolence,
twice over—to glory in it, laughing,
mocking us to our face with what she’d done.
I am not the man, not now: she is the man
if this victory goes to her and she goes free. (ll. 536-542, Fagles, p.83)

Butler’s reading calls into question the gendered division of public and private that makes Antigone’s act so controversial by highlighting the ways in which both parties transgress this distinction. She notes that gender is destabilized throughout the play in this manner; however, it begs the question of whether and how these roles were already in a state of flux.

While Creon stakes his manhood on proving Antigone wrong, Antigone takes a questioning stance. While her defiance may make her seem manly, she does not seem interested
in seizing his power. Rather, Antigone seems engaged in genuine inquiry, as we have seen, that probes the relationship between duty and choice, and through her questioning, she destabilizes gender. Creon’s awareness of this destabilization only fuels his resolve to prosecute Antigone, but as the play unfolds, there is a growing sense that Antigone begins to struggle with or question her situation, articulating ambivalence about her actions. In the following passage, it is evident that while neither has reached an understanding of the terms of the other’s argument, Antigone is questioning the foundation of even her own beliefs, while Creon is steadfast in his.

\begin{verbatim}
Antigone
No matter—Death longs for the same rites for both.
Creon
Never the same for the patriot and the traitor.
Antigone
Who, Creon, who on earth can say the ones below don’t find this pure and uncorrupt?
Creon
Never. Once and enemy, never a friend, not even after death.
Antigone
I was born to join in love, not hate—
that is my nature. (ll. 584-591, Fagles, pp. 85-86.)
\end{verbatim}

Repeatedly, and in this passage in particular, we see Antigone struggling against Creon, but more poignantly, through her self-references, she is struggling with questions of subjectivity through her public act of burying her brother and her grappling with the significance of that burial. As Butler pointed out, it is difficult to claim that Antigone is conscious of all the connotations of her actions, and this is part of what makes her story so compelling. Antigone does not have complete access to the significance of her deed, yet as the play unfolds so too do the layers of meaning surrounding it.

Creon, on the other hand, holds a stance based on a complete devotion to civic duty and an emphasis on the good of the community over the good of the individual. Nussbaum noted that
he wants to “replace blood ties with civic friendship” and recognizes only the “bonds of choice” that permeate the polis (Nussbaum, 1986, p. 57). It is only after the loss of his niece, his wife, and his son, Haemon, Antigone’s fiancé, that Creon gains what she terms “a less confident wisdom” (Nussbaum, 1980, p. 52) as he realizes what his singular vision has cost him. In his steadfast adherence to the laws of the polis, Creon attempts to position Antigone in counterpoint to his own argument. As Creon becomes more adamant, Antigone becomes more ambivalent, rather than strengthening her resolve in opposition to him. Her response to Creon also contributes to the case for Antigone as a young woman. As we will see in Chapter Four, discourses of young femininity often attempt to move young women into counternarrative positions. By rebuking Creon’s insistence through reconsiderations of her own positions and beliefs, rather than solidifying an opposing position to his, Antigone uses a powerful tool of resistance, although this resistance is occurring both consciously and immediately.

Antigone is therefore a defiant prepolitical story, as opposed to a political one (Butler, 2000; Sjoholm, 2004). Prepolitical movements are still in the process of developing the language and even the purpose behind their work. Sjoholm notes that the tragedy of Antigone describes the split and then renegotiation of the ethical order rather than a victory of one over the other, as Hegel suggests. Rather, Antigone’s action calls into question the sacrosanct distinction between the two spheres. Considering ethical life as a prepolitical space allows the possibility that a discursive space is shaped between the political space of the polis and the private space of the oikos through ambiguous acts such as Antigone’s. In contributing to this discursive space,

26 Cecelia Sjoholm (2004) suggests that Sittlichkeit is a prepolitical space where a tension brews between a community based on customs and the abstract concept of a state.
Antigone’s actions problematize the strict distinctions between public and private while at the same time holding significance for her as a subject, a phenomenon that will be discussed in further detail in the next section.

Antigone is neither devoted to the laws of the polis, which she breaks, nor strictly loyal to those of the oikos. Fitting neatly into neither category, her actions move her away from this dichotomy and toward a new space. Readings of Antigone that essentialize her, claim that she is loyal to either the polis or the oikos, rationalize her actions and make her ambiguities into known quantities. However, Antigone’s story suggests that change is instigated by the disruption caused by the actions of the new. I argue that Antigone is a young woman whose struggle to assert her subjectivity within a public space becomes an important inquiry that destabilizes binaries and contributes to discursive space between public and private.

III. A Space in Between: The Melancholy Move to Adulthood

I go to my rockbound prison, strange new tomb—
Always a stranger, O dear God,
I have no home on earth and none below,
Not with the living, not with the breathless dead. (ll. 939-942, Fagles, p. 103)

Antigone’s link to her peculiar family brings up questions of the relationship between the public and private spheres but also alludes to the ways in which developmental narratives are constructed as a process of divesting oneself from the past. As the daughter of an incestuous marriage, the sister who must bury the brother whom she loves (perhaps in more than a sisterly way) despite the decree of the king, the niece of the king who forbids her actions, and the sister/aunt of the brother she buries, Antigone’s relationships to her family, her community, and
the state are as complex as they are deeply intertwined. Her history poses important questions about not only family relationships but also the ways in which our past is always already implicit in our present actions and the extent to which we bring our early lives with us into adulthood. Antigone’s act of mourning can be viewed as melancholic if one reads her as unable to undo the bond she shares with her lost brother in order to go on with her own life (Butler, 1997). However, Antigone’s melancholia extends beyond her need to acknowledge the loss of this particular brother, gesturing toward a contemplation of all that is lost as she moves away from the family of her childhood, all dead (save her sister), toward the family of her future, as she plans to marry Creon’s son, Haemon. This tension between particular losses and universal ones will be the subject of this section.

Prior Tragedies

The movement from childhood to adulthood is often portrayed as a period of loss, when young people must leave behind elements of the past to move toward the future. This view of development as a linear path along which young people leave behind childish ways as they learn the ways of adulthood is well documented in the literature on adolescence (Aapola, Gonik, & Harris, 2005; Britzman, 1998; Lesko, 1996; Stevens et al., 2007) however, it has yet to be investigated as an aspect of emergent adulthood, so I turn to the literature on adolescence to guide my thinking here. Such critiques note that discourses of adolescence dictate the necessity of relinquishing the childish past in favor of the grown-up future. However many youths’ lives follow no such normative narrative. In a family such as Antigone’s for example, her narrative is anything but normative, yet she is still compelled to bury her brother in keeping with the
universal customs of Greek family life. I argue that it is possible to read Antigone’s actions as both an expression of the universal laws and her particular place in them and that she is struggling to articulate the ambivalence of her position between the two, though she is not totally conscious of this effort. Antigone’s story helps us to think about how young people, better equipped with tools for self-expression and articulation, may be able to hold their pasts through articulations of their subjectivity as they move toward the future.

The practice of mourning is at the center of Antigone’s life story: Her act of burial capitulates the drama between Creon and her, and what precedes this episode is a series of prior tragedies with which she must also cope. Before the death of her brothers, before her clandestine burial of Polyneices, Antigone has lost both her parents, whose deaths followed the discovery of their incestuous union. Antigone’s actions, while often characterized as a result of her mourning, may be viewed as melancholic. Butler (2000) notes that because the social conditions are such that Antigone is forbidden to publicly grieve her loss, she internalizes the object of her loss and, subsequently, pays a great price. Yet Butler also poses the question of what precisely Antigone is mourning: “Can we assume that Antigone has no confusion about who is her brother, and who is her father, that Antigone is not, as it were, living the equivocations that unravel the purity and universality of those structuralist rules?” (Butler, 2000, p. 18). Thus we must ask: What exactly is the object of Antigone’s loss? Must she comprehend the particular object of her loss in order to engage in “mourning practices”? And more broadly, does the specter of her past prevent her from moving into the future, or can she hold on to objects from the past as she forges subject positions in the future? I argue that Antigone’s melancholia stems from ambivalence toward the future, which requires that she give up her past. Through her actions, she demonstrates an
unwillingness to do this that is articulated between the lines, through her ambivalence and the questioning stance that her actions provoke as articulated in her dialogues throughout the play. In considering Britzman’s work on Anne Frank with Butler’s work on Antigone, I draw upon their common experiences of loss as they are moving toward adulthood and consider the impacts that loss is implicit in this movement, both for adolescents and emergent adults.

Melancholia and the Social

For Freud, the work of mourning is done through the externalization of the mourned object so the mourner can relinquish that object and get on with life. Mourning, which he describes as “the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or some abstraction that has taken the place of one such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal, and so on” (Freud, 1963, p. 164), requires a fixed reality to which the mourner will return upon completion of the process, or externalization of the lost object. “The normal outcome is that deference for reality gains the day” (Freud, 1963, p. 165).

For the melancholic, the process takes a different turn. As mourning without end, melancholia turns us away from the external world into the psyche. This inscribing of the social in the psyche is moving the act of mourning into a private space, due in part to the fact that the melancholic lacks the language to externalize what is internal. It is also the result of the unconscious nature of the loss that melancholics experience. Freud notes, “In grief, the world becomes poor and empty; in melancholia, it is the ego itself” (Freud, 1963, p. 167). The goal for the melancholic becomes retaining the lost object: The past remains present in an attempt to fill this emptiness.
Antigone, in her struggle to perform burial rites for Polyneices, commits a public act. At first glance, this seems very much aligned with the process of mourning, since it is a public act done out of grief. However, as Butler notes, Antigone’s public act not only transgresses the interdiction of her uncle against the burial of Polyneices but also publicly announces a love that never should have been spoken, since it was born of her parents’ incestuous marriage and implies a connection between the two siblings that echoes their parents’ love. Butler notes that the impact of the incest taboo upon Antigone forecloses the possibility of love for her, thus backing her into a corner of melancholia; she does not have the option to mourn her losses publicly because they are in direct contrast to the cultural norms of her day. This foreclosure is further complicated by the entanglement of her kinship group with the powers of the state, thus underscoring again the connections between the realms of the family, the public, and the social. Of this entanglement Butler observes:

What emerges is a melancholia that attends living and loving outside the livable and outside the field of love, where the lack of institutional sanction forces language into perpetual catachresis, showing not only how a term can continue to signify outside its conventional constraints but also how that shadowy form of signification takes its toll on a life by depriving it of the sense of ontological certainty and durability within a publicly constituted political sphere. (Butler, 2000, p. 78)

What Butler asserts here is the notion that melancholia, though a personal condition in that it is an internalization of a lost object, is also shaped by the social and cultural context of the melancholic. The fact that Antigone’s family’s crimes were committed before she was born implicated her in them from the moment of her birth. Thus, there is no condition under which

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27 Butler’s work relied heavily on Levi-Strauss’s work on incest. She noted that while incest is held as a universal taboo, Levi-Strauss concedes that these rules do not function in all cases. Thus, Butler wondered, what are the conditions under which the taboo does not work, and more generally, how a rule can work without “producing and maintaining the specter of its transgression?” (Butler, 2000, p. 17)
Antigone could mourn publicly in an acceptable way. The roles of her family members are also complicated by the fact of her incestuous parents. Though she is burying her brother Polyneices, she has also experienced ungrievable losses including her father (brother), Oedipus, and her brother Eteocles, not to mention her mother, Jocasta. In her speech before she is taken to the cave where she will die, she reflects on her family’s past:

you with your own son, my father—doomstruck mother!
Such, such were my parents, and I their wretched child.
I go to them now, cursed, unwed, to share their home—
I am a stranger! O dear brother, doomed
in your marriage—your marriage murders mine,
your dying drags me down to death alive! (ll. 953-958, Fagles, p. 103).

Antigone’s reference to her parents, and her own status as a stranger, alludes to her sense of confusion about her family’s past, and the impossibility of a future other than death.

Butler notes that this confusion begs the question of whom she is grieving, as well as whether she acts to mourn her particular brother or his particularity is incidental, his burial being merely a statement about her right or her need to bury someone. While Antigone is melancholic with regard to her family’s past, Butler does not view her as melancholic over the loss of Polyneices. To the contrary, she asserts that Antigone actually uses the public interdiction against her mourning to highlight the impossibility of mourning any member of her family. Beyond the underscoring of this impossibility, I see her act as an articulation of both her particular struggle and the universal struggle to grow up in a culture where it is assumed that it is possible for all young women to follow a particular developmental narrative.
Particular Losses

Accounts of adolescent lives are rich texts for exploring this tension between the dominant narrative and the particularity of a young person within a social context, and a great deal of work has been done in this area. In her work on Anne Frank’s diary, Britzman (1998) notes that various readings of the diary have posited Anne as either a representative of a particular sort of adolescence or a universal spokesperson for Jewish youth. Rather than placing her in either category, Britzman urges us to explore the ways in which Anne’s text is an ambivalent exploration of her situation. As a Jew, she is literally an outcast in hiding during the Nazi occupation in Europe, yet as a teenager, she is articulating a desire to belong and a feeling of being cloistered that is resonant with young people of any background. Britzman notes that in her confinement, Anne is forced to confront “an anti-Semitic definition of Jewishness that renders irrelevant the ambivalent longing both to belong without distinction and to be seen as distinct” (1998, p. 122). As much as Anne wants to be a particular subject, she is also aware of the dominant narrative of youth that is inaccessible to her as a Jewish girl. She articulates this tension in the diary, although, Britzman notes, many readings of the diary have wished to focus on the universalizable themes of adolescence rather than the particularity of this girl.

It is true that Anne’s writing can be read in this way; however, to deny that the particularity of her actions is shaped by her confinement is denying Anne subjectivity. If we look at her writing as a contribution to a discursive public space as merely a set of generalizable observations about coming of age, much is lost. Similarly, to look at Antigone as a representative of all women speaking within the public sphere is to lose a great deal of the nuance of her story, as well as her subjectivity, which both she and Anne struggle to articulate through their public
actions. In neither case could the protagonist have imagined the impact that her work would have on public discourse, but this does not provide a reason to ignore its particularity. Rather, it is a powerful imperative to consider both the particularity of these young women and the ways in which their young womanhood contributes to our universal view of young femininity as it is shaped by particular experiences.

While Britzman did not suggest that Anne was melancholic per se, like Antigone Anne experiences unspeakable and lingering losses. I return to Freud’s consideration of melancholia, which notes that the loss that the melancholic experiences is often unconscious and thus difficult to articulate. Butler concedes that Antigone is not completely conscious of her act and that this unconsciousness is instantiated through language. She uses the term “brother,” and the chorus reminds her that Polyneices was not her only brother: Eteocles and arguably Oedipus are also her brothers. Therefore, it is not only the laws of kinship and state that she must struggle against, but the constraints of language as well, and the difficulty of articulating a loss that is almost unspeakable. Antigone’s struggle, although articulated as the struggle to bury her brother, is actually a struggle to reconcile her own fate as the daughter of an incestuous marriage, now an orphan and on the eve of her own marriage, which will result in a shift into yet another role. The work of mourning is a reconciliation of the past with the future. In Antigone’s case, she remains melancholic as she struggles to conceive of the future while still burdened with an unspeakable past that she herself does not fully acknowledge.

Antigone’s melancholia is “a melancholy of the public sphere” (Butler, 2000, p. 81), in that her loss is made all the more unspeakable by the fact that she exists in the public sphere as someone who never should have participated there in the first place. Beyond the particular loss
of her brothers and parents, Antigone’s melancholia is related to the very fact that, even as an actor in the public sphere, she is denied the subjectivity she seems to demand through her actions not only because of her gender but because of her family background. Butler expands upon the notion of public melancholia using the example of AIDS-related deaths, the mourning of a loved one whom one never should have loved publicly in the first place, according to social stigmas against homosexuality (Butler, 1997). Such a loss, which begins with a transgression of the social “rule” of heterosexual normativity, must be mourned privately. This private mourning may result in melancholia, which Butler presents as a foreclosure of love; on one hand, melancholia is an attachment substituting for one that is broken or gone; on the other hand, it stands in for the impossibility of the subject’s attachment to the lost object (Butler, 1997). Butler describes the ensuing melancholia under such conditions as a foreclosure that is the very condition under which social existence is possible for someone who is gay.

Similarly, Antigone’s loss of her brother is such an unspeakable loss. Not only did Polyneices die while fighting against the city, a socially unacceptable action, but both he and she lived as the children of Oedipus. In both life and death, their actions violated Greek customs, and in attempting to mourn her brother’s death and acknowledge his life, Antigone brings to light both of these conditions, whether or not it was her intent to do so. For Antigone, to act publicly is a demand not only that she be acknowledged as capable of mourning her brother but also a demand that she be acknowledged as a particular subject despite her transgressions of the norms that are generally the conditions under which one is considered to be a subject within Greek society.
Butler also notes that society’s response to the practice of mourning AIDS deaths is to vanquish such alternative responses: The melancholic, in other words, serves as both self-regulating and socially regulative. She notes that we rarely consider the possible scenarios that may occur when a social role fails to work. She questions whether the existence and function of such rules also produce the conditions under which they may be defied; “the specter of its transgression” is always an open question (Butler, 2000, p. 17). Freud’s relation of melancholia to the unconscious through one’s knowledge of “whom he has lost but not what it is he has lost in them” (Freud, 1963, p. 166) seems to speak directly to Antigone’s situation. Aware that she has lost her brother, Antigone does not see the larger picture: that she has always been at a loss.

If the loss that brings melancholia is itself unconscious, how can we articulate such losses at all? Furthermore, how can melancholics announce a silenced past when they cannot find the language to externalize the silenced present? If we follow Freud, it is critical to announce the internal to start to heal, but the difficulty is in the subtle matter of moving from the knowledge of whom (or, an identification of what is lost, per se) to an expression of what was lost, ideologically or psychically speaking. The development of a concept of what was lost and a mode of expressing that loss is, as Freud himself suggests, bounded by the objective reality into which the recovering person must enter in order to proceed with healthy living. Thus, the ability to make attempts at expressing this loss is crucial, which for those unconscious losses, requires some sort of inquiry.

In Antigone’s case, it seems a bit strange that someone who is living the legacy of her family must express this loss—whom she has lost—when she has been in a perpetual state of unarticulated loss all along. Butler is convinced that Antigone chooses to articulate the particular
loss of Polyneices because to articulate *what* she has lost would be an enormous task that would entail an acknowledgement of her family’s past and the ways in which it constantly impacts her present and will certainly impact her future. It is not possible for Antigone to return to the status quo, as a healthy mourner would, because she has always been outside these cultural norms. Yet, by mourning Polyneices, Antigone can at least address her unspeakable losses in through the inquiry that occurs when she publicly expresses that particular loss. Transgressing the rules (to use Butler’s language), therefore, allows Antigone to address this particular loss as one part of the larger sense of loss that she carries due to her gender and her family’s incestuous past.

Like Anne Frank, Antigone does not survive to adulthood, and there is something particularly melancholic about reading the stories of these young women who do not grow up. Both make contributions to the discursive public space through their actions, articulating both the particularities of their situations and the universality of their situation as young women. Britzman notes that the practices of mourning and melancholia are linked to our notions of pedagogy, in that we teach the past in an effort to both maintain ties with that past and learn about ourselves. Anne Frank’s writing and Antigone’s actions and speech both became public forms of inquiry to which we have access, and that may guide our own inquiries.

In the next chapter, I will argue that young women who write personal zines and blogs also create discursive spaces in which particular subjectivities are negotiated. These writing practices are significant because they occur within a particular kind of public space where they receive recognition from an audience of both known and unknown members. I will argue that, like Antigone’s action, these writings articulate the particularity of young women who alter public discourses through personal contributions.
Chapter Four

Texts in Context: Zines and Blogs

I’m just going to write what I feel like writing because that is all I can do.
(Sabrina Simon, *Four Horsemen* #3, March 2008)

I. Introduction

In Chapter Three, I argue that through her actions Antigone problematizes the relationships between the public and the private, the spheres of kinship and the social and her speech and actions constitute an important form of inquiry. Antigone, through her actions, attempts to speak the unspeakable, and in taking such a risk produces a discursive space as she engages with the public. However, I have also argued that Antigone has been misinterpreted by many of her critics and supporters alike. First, she has been referred to as a being for others who assists others in their ascent to subjectivity, when in fact she herself is also engaged in the struggle for subjectivity. I assert that her story instead underscores the ways in which all subject positions are contingent, both upon others around us and upon the contexts in which we strive for subjectivity. Through her own inquiry within the public sphere, she calls the laws of the community into question. In this chapter, I will look at the ways in which young women who write personal zines and blogs contribute to discourses of young womanhood by questioning existing discourses with their particular experiences.
Throughout this text, I will use the terms “zining” and “blogging” to indicate that the writing of zines and blogs are distinct practices that cannot be fully described with the term “writing”. Guzzetti and Gamboa (2004) use the term “zining” to connote the significance of the writing of zines as a literacy practice, which they define as an articulation of one’s membership in a particular community of discourse. I agree with their stance that literacy practices are not merely expressions of our ability to communicate through language; they are also statements about our cultural contexts and, particularly in the cases of zining and blogging, statements about choices we have made with respect to joining particular communities of practice. Like Antigone’s choice to defy Creon’s edict and uphold her duty to bury her brother, zinesters and bloggers choose to zine and blog but, I will argue, because they are public inquiries, they serve a larger purpose than self-reflection and are also part of a larger discussion that challenges hegemonic discourses of young womanhood.

Beyond simply reading and writing, contemporary definitions of literacy note that a multiplicity of social and cultural practices shape the ways in which we interpret the world, including the ways in which we create and interact with texts (Elmborg, 2006; Gee, 2007). Literacy, in this sense, describes ways of knowing, communicating with, and understanding the world based on our experiences, the contexts in which those experiences occur, and the social and cultural rules we learn through these interactions (Heath, 1983; Street, 1994). The term “literacy practices” refers to the ways in which we exercise and explore these literacies, and within the context of literacy research, these practices may be used to learn more about the discourses that they produce and in which they are produced, as well as the subject positions inhabited by their producers.
Like Guzetti and Gamboa, Boyd (2005) contends that the practice of blogging is beyond merely writing. She notes that it challenges the way we think of discursive practices generally:

Blogs must be conceptualized as both a medium and a byproduct of expression. This shift allows us to see blogs in terms of culture and practice. Furthermore, this provides a framework in which to understand how blogging has blurred the lines between orality and literacy, corporeality and spatiality, public and private. (p. 2)

Boyd, who conceptualizes a blog as a medium, encourages her readers to consider the ways in which blogging is not merely a unique form of writing but also a unique way of being. This quote from Mimi, a blogger who also writes outside her blogging practices, suggests that bloggers conceptualize blogging as a different activity altogether: “I should be writing more…I guess blogging kind of helps. I think I have writer's block. Reading my old blogging self reminds me that I must cheer up, live a little” (Mimi, We’re Living La Dolce Vita, July 21, 2010). While her blogging practice is related to other writing she does in other contexts, it is also distinct from those practices. Mimi concedes that blogging helps her with other writing; however, as Boyd notes, the practice seems inseparable from the individual. Mimi refers to her “old blogging self” as a person on whom she can look back, distinct from the young woman who blogs now. Removed from the present of her old blogging self, Mimi is conscious of herself in a way that she could not have been in that moment of writing. Thus, Mimi’s blogging practice is an important literacy practice that informs her subjectivity as well.

In this chapter, I will therefore argue that zining and blogging are also subjectivity practices because zinesters and bloggers use their writing as an occasion for inquiry, posing questions about their identities and contexts through their work. They inhabit these practices, create community through them, and contribute to discursive spaces with their work. These
practices are ways of being in the world and articulations of that being at the same time. I will also discuss zines and blogs as mediated publics, where zinesters and bloggers engage with an audience through the mediations of web-based and print writing. They are aware that their work will be read, but not necessarily by whom. This ambiguous awareness has a direct impact on zines and blogs as subjectivity practices.

Finally, I will argue that zining and blogging are forms of inquiry, and I will discuss these inquiries against the tableau of hegemonic discourses of young femininity. By hegemonic, I mean that these discourses provide a rationale through which young women may consent to their own subordination (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). The rhetoric of hegemonic discourses of young femininity is often accepted as common sense, and therefore become authoritative (Aapola, et al., 2005; McRobbie, 2004a, 2004b). It is this authority that the zine and blogging practices of young women complicate. By exploring the hegemonic discourses of young femininity alongside research on zines and blogs and the writings of zinesters and bloggers, I will show that what zines and blogs offer is not a foil to these discourses, but rather a challenge to the very structures that make them hegemonic.

It is not my intention to set zines and blogs in binary opposition to hegemonic discourses; rather, I wish to show that zines and blogs destabilize hegemonic discourses of female adolescence and young womanhood. As I will discuss, popular conceptions of girlhood and young womanhood are often taken to be descriptive of the ways in which young women enact femininity; however, I argue that these depictions are more prescriptive than descriptive. Gender is performed based on our notions of what is appropriate and whether and how we wish to comply with these standards (Butler, 1990; Grosz, 1994; McRobbie, 1991). As I have argued,
young women understand how to perform femininity when they arrive at their teen years, and through their personal writings, they explore the issue of gender in both particular and general ways. Because hegemonic discourses of female adolescence have been closely studied by multiple academic disciplines, while discourses of emergent adulthood have not been so well studied, I will attend to these discourses in this chapter. By attending to zining and blogging practices, educators may aid in the work of preventing the proliferation of hegemonic discourses of emergent adulthood.

II. Two Texts: Zines and Blogs

What are Zines and Blogs?

All of the zines and blogs in this study are, to the best of my knowledge, written by choice. Coupled with the fact that they are both self-reflective writings undertaken in public, this sets them apart from other kinds of writing. As Sarah Elizabeth indicates in this quote: “I have writer’s block. I can blog. Blogging is different. Writing assignments are what I cannot do right now” (Sarah Elizabeth, 6Birds, January 24, 2010). Sarah Elizabeth’s ability to “blog” despite her inability to “write” indicates the unique status that blogging, and I will argue, zining, have with to their authors as literacy practices.

To describe the similarities between zines and blogs, it is first necessary to make a few distinctions between them. The most obvious difference between zines and blogs has to do with their presentation and the methods through which readers may access them. Blogs, short for weblogs, are often compared to online diaries or journals because many personal blogs tend to be serial expressions of their author’s thoughts, opinions, and feelings. Entries in blogs are listed in
reverse chronological order, so when readers come to a blog, they find the most recent entry first. Most people who read blogs do so online (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickhur, 2010). Blogs can be found through search engines; however, most bloggers who keep personal blogs, as opposed to political or topical blogs, tend to inform friends or fans about their blogs, supporting the notion that bloggers tend to use blogs as a form of “impression management,” allowing authors to write their thoughts to multiple people at once, much as people use email to keep in touch (Stefanone & Jang, 2007).

Zines, in general, are small magazines that physically resemble a pamphlet. They are self-published and tend to be created through collage methods, photocopied, and fastened together with staples. The zines I will explore in this study are all perzines, or personal zines, written by young women. Finished zines are distributed in a few ways. Often they are sold or traded by the author herself through the mail and are solicited by readers who have found them online or through zine catalogs such as Factsheet Five. Zinesters (the authors of zines) may also distribute copies to distros, which collect zines to sell, or make arrangements with the proprietors of popular sites for loitering youth such as record stores, bookstores, comic book shops, and cafes. As with blogs, zine readers must seek them out deliberately, although serendipitous encounters with zines will occur if one is situated in the right places.28

Zining practices have changed somewhat since the proliferation of the personal computer, as have zine communities. In the early days of zine writing, most were hand-lettered or typed on a typewriter or word-processor. Thanks to desktop publishing innovations in the 1990s, many zines are now created at least in part by using a computer. Zinesters now often keep blogs, and

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28 The ramifications of this serendipity will be discussed further in Chapter Five.
there is an online community devoted to zines and zinesters as well. While zinesters have taken advantage of some of the affordances of the Internet to distribute their work and keep in touch with the zine community, many still maintain that the physical and tangible aspects of the zine are its hallmark qualities (Freedman, 2005).

Zines and blogs also came of age at different moments in history, and thus each is somewhat a product of its era. Zines became prevalent in the late 1970s. In one of the most comprehensive studies of zines and zinesters, Stephen Duncombe (2008) notes that although the zine scene is incredibly varied, it has firm roots in the DIY ethos prevalent in punk culture. Zinesters tend to consider themselves outside the mainstream and through their zining practice can be quite critical of it. Duncombe notes that the zine subculture emits a sense of “a radically democratic and participatory ideal of what culture and society might be…ought to be” (Duncombe, 2008, p. 7). Zinesters rebuff attempts to generalize or categorize their work, reveling in their transgressive tastes and behaviors and the indefinability of the genre.29 When zines are covered by the mainstream media, zinesters tend to critique not only the coverage of their work, but also the act of making an attempt to popularize zining. Due in part to this antagonistic relationship to mainstream culture, zining remains an underground practice.

Blogging was unofficially practiced as soon as the Internet became accessible, beginning in the late 1990s. Personal websites could be updated by anyone who knew how to create a site. Blogging software was first developed by Pyra Labs in 1999, making it easy for anyone to create a blog using their templates (Boyd, 2006). Unlike zines, which are specifically linked to a

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29 In spite of this observation, Duncombe created a “zine taxonomy,” which includes the genre name of “perzine,” or personal zine, a term that many of the young women zinesters whose work I read for this study use to describe their own work.
subcultural milieu, the term “blog,” although coined by a blogger, was popularized by the corporate community of web developers who created blogging software (Boyd, 2006). As an emergent online activity, blogging was seized upon by the media, which questioned the rights of bloggers to consider themselves “citizen journalists,” and made into a product by the software companies, who marketed it as a crucial communication tool. Thus, almost immediately, a great diversity of bloggers emerged, blogging about anything from their political views to what they ate for dinner. This diversity has resulted in a very diffuse understanding of what it means to blog.

The most prolific bloggers have consistently been young women; many online blogging spaces have been defined by researchers as young, feminine, and countercultural (Boyd, 2007; Driscoll, 2008). In a 2008 study of youth technology use habits, four out of ten girls between 15 and 17 years old were reported to have a blog (41%) (Lenhart, Arafeh, Smith, & MacGill, 2008). Currently, blogging is on the decline, and for teens aged 12 to 17 blogging rates have dropped drastically, from 28% in 2006 to 14% in 2009. Some have suggested that this decline is due in part to the fact that most people in these age ranges participate in social networking sites such as Twitter or Facebook, where they can update their status regularly and reach the online audience of friends and acquaintances they have “friended” or “follow” in those places (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). This finding suggests that young people who do blog may have different motivations for this practice than they did in 2008, which was the heyday of adolescent blogging.

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30 A popular blog that is now a corporate web site, chowhound.com, began as a New York City-centric food blog with a popular regular post, “What Jim Ate for Dinner.”
Like blogging, zining is a practice undertaken by both men and women, but it is most popular among adolescent and young women who can afford the time and cost of producing them (Wagner, 1998). Most zinesters of both genders tend to be middle-class and White and have self-selected a bohemian lifestyle that disdains mainstream ideas of success (Duncombe, 2008; Freedman, 2005; Wagner, 1998). Young women who write perzines are able to tell their own stories and do so in a way that differs from the presentation of young women’s lives that one sees in mainstream magazines such as Seventeen or CosmoGirl. For zinesters, participation in a countercultural practice is often an articulated value (Duncombe, 2008; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005). This counterculture is often characterized as defining itself in terms of what it is not. Duncombe notes that many zinesters position themselves against the mainstream, which can at times contribute to the perception of zines as counternarrative. However, zines are not simply counternarrative accounts; rather, they are unique and important expressions of the lives of everyday people. Moreover, due to their stream-of-conscious, non-linear, and pastiche style of writing, zines, like blogs, are not technically narrative writings.

Duncombe goes so far as to say that the authors of zines tend to be “freaks, geeks, nerds, and losers” (p. 22). This makes sense, he argues, because “marginalized people with little power over their status in the world still retain a powerful weapon: the interpretations they give to the circumstances and conditions that surround them, and the ideals and character traits that they possess” (p. 24). By writing zines, the so-called freaks and losers become visible, and, as
Duncombe asserts, they reclaim the title of “loser” by creating a space in which they are visible and their idiosyncrasies are valued as assets.³¹

Perzines provide an avenue for regular people to talk about their daily lives and experiences in an era when we see no such regular people in our daily doses of media. While Duncombe’s study was conducted in the days before reality television and the Internet, zinesters (Freedman, 2005) and academics (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004; Knobel & Lankshear, 2002) have agreed that zines remain a unique medium for expression, even in the digital age. In general, zines are created without high-gloss production or the promise of financial gain, and in the case of perzines espouse the views of one person. What is remarkable about most zines, and perzines in particular, is actually how unremarkable they are:

These personal zines are testimony that regular people think about themselves, about their experience, about politics, and about their roles as creators and consumers of culture. If this doesn’t seem radical, and it shouldn’t, watch television tonight or leaf through Time or Newsweek. How many “regular” people do you see or hear? Of these, how many have their views expressed in a form different from a statistical average or in a space larger than a sound-bite, or play a role other than victim or freak on a talk show? (Duncombe, 2008, p. 29)

It is significant to note, as Duncombe does, that zinesters are actually doing something quite radical in expressing the banalities of their lives through their writing. In writing about their lives for public review, these young women are seeking the recognition of an audience and are therefore not only writing to express their particularities in public but also contributing to a larger conversation about young womanhood. While there is a tremendous amount of writing about young women, which contributes to hegemonic discourses of young femininity that will be

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³¹ In light of the migration of many youth bloggers to Twitter or other social networking sites for purposes of “impression management” or status updates, and based on Boyd’s research, it will be interesting to chart the changes to the blogosphere in coming years.
discussed later in this chapter, the zines and blogs of young women themselves also contribute to, and at times problematize, these discourses. Both zines and blogs are particularly suited to pose such challenges because both take place within mediated publics, where their work endures in time and is available to large audiences of known and unknown people.

III. Mediated Publics as Discursive Spaces

As mediated publics, both zines and blogs are texts publicly available texts, which means that the space constituted by them is not limited by the same boundaries that constrain a physical public. Both zines and blogs share three traits that Boyd (2007) notes characterize mediated publics: persistence, replicability, and imagined audiences. Below, I will define each trait, although, within my study, I found that persistence and invisible audiences in particular both shape zines and blogs as discursive spaces. These traits have a significant impact on how young women participate within these spaces and to whom they are able to speak through their writing. Thus, as I discuss below, persistence and invisible audience contribute to the communities and contexts where these young women participate, as well as the discourses that are formed there.

Building Community through Persistent Practices

As published material, both zines and blogs are persistent, or enduring, texts. Zines are distributed in print, while blogs are accessed online. This persistence shapes the expectations that audiences have of the two texts and contributes to the formation of a sense of community among both zinesters and bloggers.
In an essay entitled “Zines Are Not Blogs” (2005), zinester and librarian Jenna Freedman (2005) notes that zines and blogs differ tremendously in terms of their persistence. She noted also that in the library literature, zines are often referred to as “ephemera;” however, blogs are literally more ephemeral than zines. Zines are tangible objects that the readers can physically possess forever, while blogs “live” online, and while readers may access them at any time, they cannot “hold” a blog. Blogs persist online but authors can change their entries, while once a zine is published and distributed, that material cannot be altered (Freedman, 2005). These different forms of persistence impact the ways in which bloggers and zinesters practice their work and the expectations with which readers may approach these writings. However, both zines and blogs create community among their writers and readers, despite the different contexts in which these communities are formed.

As mentioned above, the zine community can be said to have a cohesive agenda (even if that agenda is anarchy) and came of age as a grassroots medium that is still largely underground (Duncombe, 2008). Blogging had a short-lived period as a counter cultural practice, due in part to the investment of corporate interests in selling blogging software and the media attention it gained early on (Boyd, 2006; Driscoll & Gregg, 2008). Another contributing factor to the more populist nature of blogging has to do with contemporary concepts of the Internet as a highly democratic space. While many researchers have demonstrated this claim to be dubious, this perception persists.\footnote{For example, scholars have cited the overwhelming whiteness of YouTube video producers (McMurria, John (2006), “The YouTube Community,” Flow blog essay, October 20) and the trending migration of White youth from MySpace to Facebook as more people of color joined (Boyd, 2007).} Thus, the notion that anyone can have a blog, regardless of political
affiliation, gender, race, or ethnicity is ultimately as liberating as it is diffusing. The aptly named “blogosphere” can often seem vast and unmanageable.

Blogs now persist online as both networked and mediated publics, which means that participants can connect with particular members of the public, as they can on social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace. The addition of the tools that allow bloggers to “follow” one another’s blogs and the practice of bloggers “affiliating” with one another have helped some bloggers create communities online. These features have helped blogs seem more relevant to a generation of young people who have come of age with social networking web sites as the gold standard of online participation and also allows bloggers to create a sense of community. Despite these changes, blogging continues to wane as an online practice for teens and young adults.

Why, then, do some young women continue to blog? When young women maintain a blog, I argue they are fulfilling a different agenda than when they use a social networking site. While all of the bloggers in my study either linked to or referred to the fact that they have either a Facebook, MySpace, or Twitter account (or all three), they persisted in their blogging practice by posting detailed or pithy entries regularly. Two of the four bloggers in the study had maintained the blog used in this study for two years, one had maintained her blog for over four years, and another had had this particular blog for a year. The authors in my study also provided a level of detail in their writing that is not compatible with social networking sites. For 3 out of the 4 bloggers in this study, their entries regularly exceeded 500 words, something that would not be possible on a social networking site. The degree to which these bloggers personalized
their blogs, in terms of layout, content, and usability, was well beyond the limitations that social networking sites place on their users.\textsuperscript{33}

The standards of persistence for bloggers and zinesters also differ. Audiences expect bloggers to update frequently in order to hold their interest, whereas, as Freedman (2005) points out, if zinesters do not publish a zine for years, their audience does not necessarily view this gap as unusual or undesirable. Zine culture is, on the whole, not as instantaneous as the blogosphere. Zinesters are known for a culture of letter writing and email correspondence with other zinesters. They build community through zine and comics events and even have their own social networking site. Despite the considerable mediation of the “snail mail” process as opposed to email, many zinesters request mail, feedback, and reviews from other zinesters. One such zinester is Ashlee, who writes, “Please write me and let me know your thoughts…Or just send along a postcard to say, ‘Hey, I read this!’ It brightens my day” (\textit{Regeneration} \#6, p. 30).

Bloggers create community through networking, but also through the audience’s ability to give instant feedback to the author through the comments function within the blog itself (Boyd, 2005; Stefanone & Jang, 2007).\textsuperscript{34} In both cases, this interaction facilitates community. The persistence of zines and blogs is a critical factor in the maintenance of the sense of community among authors and their readers.

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33 Although it has been argued that part of the rite of passage of joining MySpace is creating a personalized page (Boyd, 2007), blog layout is even more user-determined. Sarah, of 6Birds, changed the layout of her blog three times during a three-month period.

34 Some bloggers disable comments and other functions including search, such as Mimi, the author of \textit{We’re Living La Dolce Vita!} Thus there is no opportunity for discussion; the blog consists only of Mimi’s writing, with no opportunity for readers to participate other than by reading her work.
\end{flushleft}
Engaging with Invisible Audiences

Because the authors of zines and blogs are only capable of imagining their audiences as they write, their audiences are considered invisible. The impression of who their audience members may be impacts their writing, but in both cases, readers both known and unknown to the author will engage with the text. The issue of invisible audience is crucial to both zines and blogs, and, as I will argue, it is also a pivotal factor in the way readers approach these texts. The fact that zinesters and bloggers have a sense of their audience yet through the act of publication share their thoughts with the masses is a crucial aspect of both practices, one that has significant influence on each genre as a literacy practice and a discursive space where readers and writers interact. The invisible audience allows the practices of zining and blogging to serve as important occasions for young people to seek recognition from both known and unknown sources.

Even during the heyday of blogging, researchers did not consistently agree upon whether young people understood who comprised their audiences. Early studies of blogging suggested that young people use blogs to articulate alternative visions of themselves to a vast public (Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002; Calvert, 2002). However, as mentioned above, other research has suggested that young women tend to know their blog readership in their face-to-face lives and therefore use the blog as a form of “impression management,” much as people use email to keep in touch (Stefanone & Jang, 2007). While bloggers may know a portion of their audiences, unless their blogs are private or invitation-only they engage with an invisible audience.35

35 Through my own research, I have noted that young women who blog seem to be aware of both their known and unknown audience members. While this idea of audience will be addressed more fully in the next section on mediated publics, it is important to note broadly that young women are cognizant of the fact that blogging is a public
Zinesters’ and bloggers’ considerations of the impressions they make through their writing are to some extent regulated by who they imagine as their readership (Boyd, 2007). As they imagine their readers, they engage with or react to them, a dynamic that regulates what they write. The ways in which they regulate themselves before ever making contact with their audience speaks to the Lacanian account of the “mirror phase,” through which, Lacan (2007) asserts, we are always seen by others before we see ourselves. The invisible audience underscores the ways in which we are always producing subject positions in reaction to the contexts we perceive. Consider this quote from Nadia: “I think of my zine like a trashy celebrity gossip magazine, where I am the only celebrity and instead of journalists gossiping about me, I'm gossiping about myself” (Nadia, No Snow Here, No. 7). Here, Nadia creates a vision of herself through her lens of her imagined audience.

In the next chapter, I will discuss in depth the particular hold that the invisible audience has within the blogging practice, but it bears mentioning here to underscore the ways in which the mere notion of the audience regulates the blogging practice. Lizzie, who blogs Diary of a Fat Teenager, a personal blog that deals with issues of fat acceptance, discusses the fact that she worries about what she writes on her blog not only because she fears what people who know her offline (or IRL, “in real life”) will think, but also because she does not want unknown readers to find her too radical:

There are some thoughts that I don’t blog about on here either, because I am worried of what my IRL friends would think. I don’t like to think I am that radical or anything, because compared to others involved I’m really not, but compared to the people around me I feel like I am. (Lizzie, Diary of a Fat Teenager, August 15, 2008, “Split in Two”).

This does not, however, imply that young women are always cognizant of their writing’s impact upon the discourse that is generated within this mediated public.
Lizzie’s concerns demonstrate that she is thinking about the multiple audiences who read her blog, and this mediates her participation in this space. Through her writing, she is creating a context for her own subjectivity work, but she is constantly cognizant of the fact that others necessarily participate in this space and, I argue, to a lesser degree, that they contribute to her work.

In my small study, I found that many young women bloggers had online audiences who were a unique community, distinct from their friends in their everyday lives offline. This unique community generally consists of others who are also deeply invested in a blogging practice and who share a similar understanding of what blogging means to them. Bloggers tend to feel passionately about their blog because of this community-building capacity, but they are aware of their invisible audiences as well (Boyd, 2007; Driscoll, 2008). In both cases, bloggers are able to communicate something very particular about themselves because they share a particular understanding—Driscoll (2008) refers to it as a literacy—of what it means to blog. In other words, part of the blogging practice is engagement with a community of other bloggers. This makes the recognition that bloggers receive through their blogging practices distinct from other forms of writing they may do within other contexts. Based on these findings, I argue that blogging is a way of being for young women; it is more than a writing practice or an online space.

In this section, I have argued that the self-referential writing within the zining and blogging practices of young women contribute to mediated publics that are discursive spaces where young women encounter both known and invisible audiences. Through these audiences, zinesters and bloggers build community with strangers and other practioners of their work. In
publicly stating the banal, these young women articulate a relationship between their private lives and public discourse. And, as writing that they have chosen to do, it is distinct from other forms of writing that may be compulsory, such as school assignments. For these reasons, I argue that it is an important literary practice in that it not only indicates the abilities of young women to communicate using language but also provides important information to their readers about the social and cultural contexts in which they are writing. In the next section, I will explore the ways in which these practices pose important challenges to hegemonic discourses of young womanhood through the inquiries of their authors.

**IV. Inquiry as Meaning Making**

The work of young people as cultural producers and meaning making is well studied in the fields of media and cultural studies (Gee, 2007; Guzzetti and Gamboa, 2004; Jenkins, 2004; Harris, 2001; McRobbie, 1990; Street, 1994; Walkerdine, 2007, etc.). However, the affective elements of meaning making are seldom discussed in these studies, in part because they are difficult to quantify and elusive to pinpoint even through qualitative study. Yet these subtle and often banal expressions are crucial to the meaning making process because they are articulations of subjectivities (Walkerdine, 2007). These subjectivities are formed within social and cultural contexts that are implicit in their expression. Thus, our personal meanings are influenced by and influencing the contexts in which they are created. It is this interplay that Walkerdine (2007) examines in her work on video gaming.

Walkerdine (2007) offers a helpful look at the affective dimensions of meaning making when she studied the role of gender in video gaming practices. She notes that in academic
discourses on video gaming, gamers are said to be engaging in literacy practices as they experiment with different roles and identities through their play (Gee, 2003; Jenkins, 1998). In these accounts, gamers are described as deliberately trying on different identities through their play and making conscious decisions about the ways in which they engage with the game and with other players. Attention is generally not given to the immediate, naïve, and unconscious aspects of play. This emphasis on the active nature of identity formation is crucial to arguments defending video games against the popular notion, proliferated through much media attention, that young people become increasingly violent or antisocial due to the effects of video gaming. The media depict video gamers as victims of the powerful messages that video games transmit, particularly those promoting violent behavior, against which they have no recourse. In this dichotomy, the active subject makes meaning through the deliberate act of trying on an identity through a game; the passive subject simply experiences the effects of the game (Jenkins, 2004). The implication is that meaning making is always an active, deliberate, and conscious process.

In her own work, Walkerdine contests the significance we place upon the dichotomy between the active and passive when discussing subjectivity. In relying on this binary, we preserve the assumption that all meaning making is done by active subjects, which does not account for the meanings we bring to the table when we engage in literacy practices. As Walkerdine notes, we do not come to such practices as blank slates; rather, our subjectivities are always already enmeshed in the social, cultural, and political discourses that permeate our everyday lives. Walkerdine asserts that subjectivity is influenced not only by norms that we internalize, but also our relationships to those norms and whether we are distinctly aware of those norms and how we engage with them. The production of subject positions is a far more
complex and ambiguous process than “trying on” identities, as Gee and Jenkins suggest. But gaming is also more than a case of gamers submitting completely to the effects of the game. Instead, Walkerdine argues, gaming is a practice that entails both active and circumstantial meaning making that just happens to occur; moreover, it is Walkerdine’s assertion that all meaning making, and thus all subjectivity work, has this quality. Rather than designate a strict distinction between active and passive, or between fantasy and reality, Walkerdine’s account of subjectivity notes that often the subject positions we inhabit are influenced by social situations over which we have little control or awareness. Whereas Jenkins’s account of subjectivity is that of a rational actor, Walkerdine’s account allows the subject to be in process and ambiguous.

Following Walkerdine, I assert that zinesters and bloggers are actively zining and blogging; however, they are not always consciously making meaning or expressing their identities. Rather, the practices of zining and blogging are forms of inquiry that connect the personal and cultural meanings that shape them. Subject positions are generated through this inquiry. Walkerdine attributed this to the affective dimensions of experience. Zining and blogging practices have the advantage of being persistent texts that exist in mediated publics; therefore, they are readily available to an audience and undeniably public. The discourse generated through these practices and the subject positions shaped therein are still quite difficult to assess.

Just as Walkerdine suggests of video gaming practices, it is tempting to say, as Jenkins and Gee did, that meaning making is always active. Zining and blogging are both activities, to be sure. However, I will argue that both are forms of inquiry that through which the young women in my study explore their personal meanings as they challenge hegemonic discourses of young
womanhood. In what follows, I explore two such hegemonic discourses and the ways that zines and blogs, as self-reflexive stories of young women’s lives, problematize these discourses. Although the young women in my study are not activists against these discourses overtly, I argue that their work challenges the hegemony of these discourses. In the first example, I will show that the engagement that young women have with popular and self-created media challenges the notion that they are victims of media. In the second example, I will demonstrate that rather than counternarratives, their writings present alternative stories that are not binarily opposed to hegemonic discourses, but rather, problematize these discourses by broadening the scope of the conversation beyond the boundaries of narrative and counternarrative.

Blogging Ophelia

In the 1980’s and 1990’s, a view of young women persisted that was based on psychological studies indicating that girls lost their sense of self upon arrival at their teen years. Books such as Gilligan’s (1982) *In a Different Voice*, and Mary Pipher’s *Reviving Ophelia* (1994) chronicled these findings for a mass audience. These texts argue that young women are "silenced" when they reach adolescence, and Gilligan particularly notes that they retreat into gendered roles, valuing themselves primarily in relation to others. Pipher’s book posits Ophelia of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as a figure who represented the loss that young women experience when they become adolescents. As mentioned in Chapter One, the resultant discourse of young femininity has been referred to as the Ophelia discourse (Aapola et al., 2005). 36Because this

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36The Ophelia discourse also furthers the marginalization of the issues effecting poor youth and youth of color, suggesting that the problems of White middle class youth are “normal” problems. Eating disorders, for example, are mentioned throughout *Reviving Ophelia*, and are described as a problem plaguing White middle and upper class
loss of self was often attributed to media messages girls attend to as teenagers, it was assumed that engagement with culture could erode one’s identity. By emphasizing the vulnerability of young women, the Ophelia discourse suggests that young women need to be protected from culture and its insidious influence.

The work of Gilligan (1982) and Pipher (1994) both occasioned a call for young women’s voices within the public domain to counter the messages that the media were prescribing. The work of bloggers and zinesters can be considered such voices, although their stories do not corroborate the Ophelia story. As mentioned above, zinesters tend to pride themselves on expressing views that are contrary to the norm. However, research on blogging suggests that there is a gendered distinction between the blogging practices of young men and women. The blogs of young women are often diary-like, chronicling the everyday events of their lives (Driscoll, 2008; Driscoll & Gregg, 2008; Gregg, 2008). Blogs of young men tend to contain their thoughts on politics and world events more than the details of their personal lives (Blinka & Samhel, 2009). This gendered distinction is also found in the writings of young people within both school assignments and other forms of out-of-school writing (Guzetti & Gamboa, 2004).

At first glance, this distinction may seem to be a recapitulation of the arguments made by Gilligan and Pipher that young women are primarily concerned with the domestic and the personal. However, I argue that the fact that young women blog about their lives in a mediated public, whereas young men are musing about politics, can be viewed in a few different ways. When girls are asked to speak publicly on their own behalf, they may give stories that affirm girls. Research shows that this is increasingly not the case. For more on the discourses of eating disorders, see Paula Saukko (2002), “‘Studying the Self: From the Subjective and the Social to Personal and Political Dialogues,’” *Qualitative Research* 2, pp. 244-264.
social stereotypes in order to meet expected norms, or they may attempt to shock. As Scodari (2005) points out, the call for young women's voices was meant to be empowering to girls, but it often had the effect of recapitulating stereotypes or of producing rather brazen accounts of young women's "true confessions." These true confessions served to emphasize what McRobbie (1991) termed "romantic individualism" in her work on magazine readership. McRobbie used this term to refer to the fact that young women learn from reading magazines to value romance above other values she coded for in her work, yet at the same time they took an individualistic approach to finding it, since the magazines encourage them not to trust other girls. She found that the magazines emphasized that the greatest good was a relationship with a man, and that one achieved romance through participating in the traditional codes of femininity. However, the magazines also placed a value on independence, in that girls could not trust other women to help them achieve their personal goals of romance. Thus, while girls were depicted as individuals, this individuality was achieved through recapitulating feminine norms and resulted in a position of distrust with other women.

As mentioned previously, McRobbie does not read romantic individualism as girls' acquiescence to gendered norms. Rather, she emphasizes the importance of looking carefully at girls’ everyday practices to assess whether their engagement with publicly available texts such as magazines suggests resistance or the questing of romantic individualism. Similarly, Antigone entered the public sphere to complete a domestically associated task, burying her dead bother. However, she does not undertake this act out of blind duty; she chooses to defy the laws of the state in order to bury him. Similarly, the fact that young women are writing about their personal lives does not necessarily mean that they are dealing with these topics in a manner that suggests
obedience to gendered norms. Rather, their particular expressions are public inquires into personal matters that challenge hegemonic discourses with their particularity.

The Ophelia discourse discounts the fact that young women are always engaged with culture and that their meaning-making practices are always already contextualized. Just as McRobbie’s (1991) work on young women who read teen magazines suggests, girls come to the texts as subjects and are aware of the cultural cues of femininity implicit in the magazines. It is an oversimplification to assert that young women develop their views of femininity solely as readers of teen magazines. As Walkerdine (2007) notes, their personal and ideological meanings are always already enmeshed, which influences the subject positions they inhabit. They arrive at these texts with prior cultural knowledge, contrary to the claims of the Ophelia discourse.

Further, elements of the effects argument made against video games can be seen as a driving force behind the Ophelia discourse. Walkerdine notes that Jenkins’ position that youth are always active makers of meaning through their gaming practices ignores the previous meanings they have made and the ways in which their lives outside the game flow into their work within the game. Similarly, through the lens of the Ophelia discourse, the practices of girls who read fashion magazines can be seen as productive of negative “effects” rather than of discourse or subject positions. The notion that young women develop a sense of femininity based on the tropes of passivity and physical beauty that the magazines emphasize suggests that these beliefs are effects of reading the magazines, rather than allowing the possibility that engagement with the magazines is a way for young women to engage with this discourse as subjects who have notions of femininity themselves, based on their own experiences within a social and cultural
context.\textsuperscript{37} When one considers the prior knowledge of feminine tropes that girls bring to these readings, it is clear that they are always forming subject positions imbued with the complexities of their experiences and contexts.

As makers of media, young people have often been ascribed incredible powers, including the ability to forge their own identities (Gee, 2003; Jenkins, 1998), exercising youth voice, and resisting hegemonic narratives of youth discourses (Harris, 2001). On this level, it is easy to see why blogging would be a challenge to the Ophelia discourse: As young women write their own stories, they are “talking back” to hegemonic discourses of young femininity. However, research on the blogging practices of young people, and young women in particular, has shown that in fact their blogging is, as Walkerdine (2007) and McRobbie (1991) suggest of other mediated practices, an expression of subjectivity through the disclosure of often very banal information to an invisible audience that may confirm or contest gendered norms. Something very powerful operates in this act of disclosure, whether it contains deliberate feminist revelations or merely information about the blogger’s daily activities. The practice of self-referential writing within a mediated public is persistent, and thus meaning making that accompanies that process is ongoing.

Another discourse that encourages young women to speak for themselves publicly was the Girl Power discourse, which characterizes young women as unassailably capable and independent (Aapola et al., 2005; Driscoll, 1999; Harris, 2004). Often posited as a

\textsuperscript{37} The practice of reading magazines, often purported to be a passive practice, is particularly valid as a meaning-making process when examined through the lens of media studies literature on the power of consumers as makers of meaning (W. Benjamin, 1978; deCerteau, 1984). In her work, McRobbie (1991) described at length the complex ways in which subject positions are produced through this practice, and, like Walkerdine (1998), she suggested that it serves to highlight crucial questions about the nature of our experiences as individuals within culture and the role that ambiguity may play in the development of subject positions.
counternarrative to the Ophelia discourse, the Girl Power discourse suggests that young women are powerful subjects who can do anything. However, as we will see in what follows, Girl Power and Ophelia, like many narrative/counternarrative pairs, are not so radically different. As two sides of the same coin, both discourses rely on the notion of adolescence as an age-bound stage that young women must pass through before they become rational adults. In the next section, I will describe the Girl Power discourse, using the practice of zining to explore the ways in which Girl Power emerged as a youth movement but was critiqued and then neutralized by the popular media. Then I will discuss the ways in which both zining and blogging serve to undermine the importance of age and stage and individualism within the two discourses.

Zines: Not a Girl Power Counternarrative

Because of their relationship with punk subcultures, zines, particularly those written by young people, are often posited as “counternarrative,” or a counter story serving as a foil to hegemonic discourses about youth. Cited as spaces of resistance where girls can “talk back” to sexist, racist and classist images within society and culture, zines are indeed a powerful medium. In this section, I will argue that while zines (and blogs) are indeed crucial discursive spaces, it is a mistake to posit them as counternarrative, since this implies that there are only two kinds of narrative available. These binaries are often expressed as the “can-do” and the “at-risk” (Harris, 2001), or the “good girl” and the “bad girl” (Merskin, 2005). However, as Merskin notes, these binaries constitute false dichotomies. Here, I will explore the false dichotomy between the discourses of Girl Power and Ophelia, suggesting that through reading zines and blogs one finds
that young women’s self-referential writings reveal a far more complex landscape of subjectivities than two opposing poles.

Aapola, Gonick, and Harris (2005) note that Girl Power is often posited in contradistinction to the Ophelia Discourse. Whereas Ophelia girls are at risk, Girl Power girls are the ultimate can-do girls. Girl Power suggests that thanks to the DIY (Do-It-Yourself) ethos of Third Wave feminism and punk subcultures, as well as their impenetrable self-concepts and limitless agency, girls can overcome anything. Girl Power originated within the Riot Grrl subculture, which emerged through the punk music scene in the early 1990s with bands such as Bikini Kill and Bratmobile (Aapola et al., 2005). These groups couple the aesthetics of hyperfemininity, such as lipstick, short skirts, and ultra-high platform heels, with those of the DIY punk rock scene, such as safety pins, the appropriation of political terms in their music, and tattoos on their bodies, in order to talk back to the masculinist punk scene. Riot Grrl zines were an important genre of perzines that helped those sympathetic to the Riot Grrl cause network and communicate (Green & Taormino, 1997). However, Riot Grrls now bristle at the mention of “Girl Power” because the term was adopted by mainstream rock bands such as the Spice Girls. As Riot Grrls gained prominence, their attitude was noted as a clear threat to perceptions of young women as passive, and the popular media began to portray Riot Grrls as aggressive (Aapola et al., 2005). “Girl Power” as a slogan caught on, however, and once marketers realized that Girl Power could be commoditized on a T-shirt, Riot Grrls themselves backed away from it. What had once represented the anti-commercial rhetoric of Riot Grrls became a catch-all phrase attached to any product or idea being marketed to women, from children’s television to deodorant. It is important to note that when young people elect to wear T-shirts with slogans, we
cannot dismiss these slogans as bereft of meaning because they are now on T-shirts. However, in this case, what was striking about the appropriation of Girl Power as a slogan was that in its original instantiation, Girl Power referred to the power young women had to subvert mainstream media and marketing, not to be participants within that framework. As Duncombe (2008) notes, part of the subculture of zinesters, and Riot Grrl zinesters in particular, is the transgression of norms. Therefore, when Girl Power itself became a commodity, it became anathema to the subculture that spawned it.

Researchers such as Harris (2001, 2004) and Boyd (2005, 2009) agree that young people are aware of the fact that expressions of youth voice are a valuable commodity. The notion of the authentic youth voice is a coveted possession by marketers who want to package what is “cool” about being a young person and use it to sell products. Youth are aware that when their stories are collected for research, be it academic, journalistic, or marketing, this practice forecloses the ability of their work to serve as a form of resistance. This begs the question of whether youths’ personal writings must serve as discourses of resistance. As mentioned above, young women who blog do not all articulate a need to resist hegemonic discourses, but many articulate the desire to be heard as individuals. The discourse of media studies, however, describes much of youth activity as resistance, or at least active meaning making. Walkerdine (2007) notes that media theorists often equate “activity” with resistance and that activity is masculine while passivity is feminine. Much of the work on the autobiographical writings of young people characterizes personal writing this way (see, for example, Zuss, 1997). The binary enacted in this case is a request for youth to make a choice about whether they will corroborate the hegemonic narrative or speak out against it.
While these practices are certainly in evidence in some youth writing, not all youth activity is a form of resistance, and it need not be thought of in this way (Walkerdine, 2007). Antigone’s act in the public sphere, for example, can certainly be characterized as an act of resistance, but as Butler (2000) points out, to assume she meant to resist would be a considerable assumption. Her act was highly particular, in that she buried her brother per her commitment to her family; however, even Antigone did not grasp how particular it was, in light of her family’s complexities. As a daughter of Oedipus, her acts are always already imbued with the significance of that relationship. As an acknowledgement of the impossibility of mourning her brother, Antigone’s act is resistant, but only insofar as it underscores the impossibility of adhering to the public–private dichotomy in her situation, as the daughter of an incestuous marriage that ties her to the very king who has forbidden the burial of her brother. Similarly, the practice of sharing the banalities of one’s life publicly opens the possibility for this kind of foreclosure. By writing publicly about their lives, like Antigone, zinesters and bloggers offer their actions up for public judgment. They cannot control the ways in which their writings may be interpreted by readers or used for purposes other than their intended ones. The Riot Grrls experienced such a loss with respect to Girl Power. As the idea rose to popularity, it came to mean something completely irrelevant to their initial intention. As I will discuss further in Chapter Six, many feminist concepts have been absorbed into mainstream culture to similar effect, giving the impression that feminism has been “taken into account” (McRobbie, 2004a) when in fact feminism is being repudiated using its own terminology.  

38 For more examples of this phenomenon with regard to feminism, see McRobbie (2004a).
As a popular commodity, Girl Power came to stand for the ethos of the “can-do” girl, a conceit that Aapola, Gonick, and Harris (2005) assert is an inversion of the trope of the “at-risk” girl that the Ophelia discourse suggests. Anita Harris (2001) describes the tendency for counter stories to serve as a foil to narratives articulated in the language of hegemonic discourses. As such, she noted that counter stories often serve merely to clarify the dominant position rather than articulate the actual stories of young women’s lives:

…many counter stories are caught in a reactive relation with master narratives; casting light into the shadows of hegemonic discourses, but failing to offer an altogether different vision. It demonstrates that a simple dichotomy between master and counter often conceals assumptions and covers over complexities. (Harris, 2001, p. 187).

As a counter story, Girl Power suggests that girls should be able to stand up for themselves and do exceptional things and suggests that there is something wrong with girls who cannot harness this power. Those who cannot are Ophelias, who are at risk of falling prey to the media culture that Girl Power girls are challenging. Young women are characterized as either capable “can-do” Girl Power girls or vulnerable “at-risk” Ophelias. Implicit here is the notion that there is something that young women who fall into these categories must do in order to rehabilitate themselves. Harris (2004) further notes that within this paradigm there is no room for young people to critique either the hegemonic discourses or the counter story, since the counter story is an inversion of the master narrative that relies on the same terms and relationships. She uses the example of youth apathy toward politics as a pervasive narrative, citing the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (the “Motor Voter” law) to demonstrate a narrative/counternarrative binary. The narrative of youth apathy was used to promote the idea that young people needed to be encouraged to participate in politics. Activist groups concerned
about the low voting rate of youth, the poor, and people of color proposed that one way to raise the rate of participation would be to make it much easier to register to vote. The so-called “Motor Voter” law, which made it possible register to vote when one renews one’s driver’s license or applies for social services, was heavily promoted by outlets for youth culture, including MTV. The counternarrative, in this case, was the idea that politics should be made to seem more appealing to young people to increase their participation. However, within this binary there is no room for a critique of politics per se. Perhaps, as Harris argues, other narratives are present within this tale, such as the corrupt nature of political culture in America, or the distance Americans feel from their leaders, or a desire to critique the electoral process, that were not told within the story of the Motor Voter Law. While Harris’s work focuses on the importance of Riot Grrl zines as a space for such critiques, I posit that all perzines, as well as blogs and other youth writing, offer such spaces for alternative stories. The life writings of young women do not need to harness the roots of Girl Power in Riot Grrl culture in order to be significant contributions to discourse. Rather, as interactions with public discourse that tell a personal story, these zines and blogs are forms of inquiry that challenge hegemonic discourses. In the next chapter, I will explore how zines and blogs provide such challenges through their inquiries.

V. Zining and Blogging Beyond Boundaries

In this chapter I have described the unique affordances of zines and blogs, which I argue are two literacy practices that are particularly well equipped to generate alternatives to hegemonic discourses on young femininity. I used the example of the Ophelia and Girl Power discourses, which draw their potency from the fact that they rely on the other’s strength as a
counter story, as well as the need to protect youth from (or market to them) the effects of media and culture, rather than acknowledge them as makers of culture themselves. Through their zining and blogging practices, which take place in mediated publics, young women conduct inquiries that contribute to alternative discourses by sharing their personal and particular stories with an invisible audience. These mediated publics in turn serve as discursive spaces to which young women zinesters and bloggers contribute. I have explored the ways in which zines and blogs are able to use the affordances of mediated publics in order to serve as alternatives to popular discourses on young women and have shown that these discursive spaces are important grounds for considering the ways in which readers and writers engage in subjectivity practices.

To conclude, I will summarize three specific ways in which zining and blogging practices counter hegemonic discourses of young femininity such as the Ophelia and Girl Power discourses. These will be explored in more detail in the next chapter. First, as I have described at length in this chapter, zines and blogs are public articulations of the experiences and thoughts of young women. As public presentations of their private lives that are available to an audience, they create a discursive space where reader and writer may meet. The importance of young women’s participation in this creation of discourse challenges the notion of young people as consumers of media culture, or victims of it, rather than producers. It also serves to challenge the notion that young women write counter stories. Rather, these practices are articulations of subject positions. While the authors may recognize the particularity of their writings foremost, as persistent texts both zines and blogs defy this immediacy, and as they are read by known and unknown audiences they become significant contributions to discourses of young womanhood.
Second, zines and blogs refute the individualism implicit within both the Ophelia and Girl Power discourses. As McRobbie argues, implicit within hegemonic discourses of female adolescence is the notion of romantic individualism, which girls interpret through popular cultural texts as evidence that they must work as individuals in order to find romance, posited throughout popular culture as a social good. Aapola, Gonick, and Harris (2005) note that a similar individualism is present in both the Ophelia and Girl Power discourses, which indicates to young women that they need to rely on themselves alone to succeed. This individualism stems in part from the notion that identity work is an internal practice and that girls must work on themselves in order to become desirable. However, zinesters and bloggers challenge notions of individualism through their emphasis on community. I have shown that both zines and blogs contain a participatory element, not only as works that are read by invisible audiences but also through zinesters and bloggers’ communications with one another through letter writing, email, and comments, and the solicitation of these communications. Further, as McRobbie and Walkerdine argue, it is important that researchers who examine these practices note that even if the content of zines and blogs does not seem particularly radical, as expressions of the person within a public space they are important statements of subjectivity within a cultural context.

Finally, the self-referential writing of young women in zines and blogs refutes the linear path of development that is posited as the “correct” way to move through adolescence. Like the hegemonic discourses discussed in this chapter, this linear narrative of development indicates steps through which a person must pass in order to reach the appropriate end. Such distinctions are often linked to schooling, implying that meeting the stage can create particular challenges for
young people whose home lives or cultural backgrounds do not match the standards set by normative discourses.

Because adolescence is a stage bound by age, the typical behaviors exhibited by female adolescents are linked to concepts of maturity and reason (Stevens et al., 2007). This has negative implications for youth whose development does not coincide with this prescribed path. Both Ophelia and Girl Power suggest such paths. While Girl Power girls can access their can-do spirit toward celebrating girlhood, Ophelia girls are victims trapped in despair. As popular discourses of adolescence, both of these stages are temporary and can be outgrown once young women become rational actors. Once girls gain reason, they will be able to tune out harmful cultural messages that plague Ophelias. Linear narratives of development also suggest that any youthful rebellion is childish, and that in order to lead a meaningful adult life such practices must be abandoned. As I will discuss in Chapter Six, that young women’s zining and blogging practices incorporate a great deal of meditation on the tension between growing up and leaving behind the childish suggests a melancholic attachment to the past. As young women write about their lives, memories, and families, they are questioning whether, and if so, how, it is necessary and possible to leave these experiences behind. Through their writing they express melancholia over the possibility of having to leave these attachments behind to move toward an adult future, even if these attachments do not coincide with our concepts of a normal childhood. I will argue

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39 It should be said that Pipher did offer helpful ways for parents and educators to connect with young women and provide them with tools to cope with stress, peer pressure, and difficult situations. However, her premise that young women lose their sense of self and need support in order to maintain it denies them a subjectivity that is ambiguous and affirms the idea that to be an adult one must have worked through the difficulties of personhood, which seems to add more undue pressure.
that zining and blogging practices suggest that such considerations are not only a challenge to hegemonic discourses of young femininity but also crucial subjectivity work.

Much work on the writing of young people, and online writings in particular, has been premised on the idea that people online need to write themselves into being (Boyd, 2007; Knobel & Lankshear, 2002). However, this approach is a parsing of the online subject from the subject positions of one’s offline life, which Walkerdine warns us against. While young women who participate online are articulating elements of their lives that they choose and that are meaningful to their imagined audiences, these writings are always imbued with their offline subjectivities. It might be more productive to think of this practice as simply writing their being. This allows us to recognize that the writing young women do both online on blogs and offline in zines is contributing to the creation of a discursive space and participating in a community rather than just writing their individual stories into being.
Chapter Five

Between Public and Private: Zining and Blogging Practices

I. “I Am a Stranger!”: Antigone as a Young Woman

The bloggers and zinesters in this study were all young women between the ages of 18 and 24. Although no longer teenagers, this age group inhabits a phase of life that has become increasingly known as “emergent adulthood” and is characterized by questions about why young people in their twenties can’t seem to “grow up” (Arnett, 2000). Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (2000) argues that this period is for many western young people characterized by ambiguity about exactly where they are situated in their life course. Enormous variability exists in the relationship that emergent adults have to education, their family lives, and future goals. Studies of emergent adults have found that their ideas of adulthood are centered upon independence. Arnett notes that an emphasis on “individualistic qualities of character” (2000, p. 473) indicates that emergent adulthood is a period of young people’s lives when they are particularly attuned to the importance of individualism within our culture as a standard for measuring maturity.

For young women such as those in my study, this focus on independence may be confounded by pressures that they feel as a result of the proliferation of hegemonic discourses of femininity, such as the Ophelia discourse, which suggests that young women are at risk, and the

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40 See, for example, Henig (2010).

41 While Arnett’s distinction is useful, it is also possible to critique him as contributing to the age and stage tropes that Stevens et al. (2007) critiqued. However, because emergent adulthood is a stage characterized by ambivalence, it is somewhat less prescriptive. Another possible critique of this theory is its failure to acknowledge race and class as factors that contribute to individuals’ connections to life stages. For example, in a 2008 essay on African American emergent adults, Arnett never mentions racism as a possible factor that complicates the perceptions and developmental narratives of African Americans.
Girl Power discourse, which suggests that young women are capable of accessing unassailable self-reliance. In this chapter, I argue that to avoid hegemonic discourses of emergent adulthood, educators and academics should work toward understanding the ambivalence of this period. One way to do this is through engaging with the publicly available writing that young people do in their free time such as zining and blogging.

As I argued in Chapter Two, Antigone is neither a child nor a woman; she is ambivalent about moving from the family of her childhood to her future as a married woman. Rather than marry her betrothed, Haemon, Creon’s son, she chooses suicide to avoid a future of scorn: “O tomb, my bridal-bed—my house, my prison, cut in the hollow rock, my everlasting watch!” (Fagles, trans., ll. 978-980, p. 105). Throughout the play she refers to herself as “a stranger” and laments that she is better off in the underworld, where she is reunited with her parents: “I go to them now, cursed, unwed, to share their home—I am a stranger!” (Fagles, trans., ll. 955-956, p. 103). As a stranger, Antigone finds a home with neither the living nor the dead. She cannot go to the underworld without following the dictate of divine law to bury her brother, but in doing so she has violated Creon’s edict against it. Rather than persist in Thebes and “grow up” through marriage, she chooses death, where she is reunited with her family. As Butler notes (2000), however, it was already impossible for Antigone to live according to the norms of ancient Greece because of her family’s incestuous and tragic past. Like today’s emergent adults, Antigone is struggling to place herself within the dominant cultural narrative. The bloggers and zinesters in this study also struggle to situate themselves within their culture according to its hegemonic narratives and discourses. In this chapter, I argue that they use zines and blogs as spaces of inquiry. Through hegemonic engagements with these texts, academics and educators may begin a
process of understanding with these young women that recognizes their particularity yet provides insight into the zeitgeist of contemporary young womanhood. Such work could curtail hegemonic discourses on emergent adulthood within educational communities.

II. Hermeneutic Work in Third Spaces

A Process of Understanding: Hermeneutic Engagements with Texts

I engaged with the texts used in this study as a hermeneutic researcher and reader. By reading both texts and coding them for various themes, I gathered the data that I used in this chapter and the next to argue that zines and blogs are discursive spaces that exist between public and private. As a hermeneutic inquiry, my approach to the texts privileged process. As I discussed in Chapter Two, I view hermeneutics to be as much an inquiry into the work that goes into understanding as it is an inquiry into the meanings of texts. As Heidegger (1969) notes, hermeneutic study is the practice of doing understanding; therefore, it is work that is never complete. This sort of hermeneutic work is an ideal way to engage with texts such as zines and blogs that articulate subjectivities. Like subjectivities themselves, hermeneutic projects are always in process and partial.

The hermeneutic method also influences my approaches to the texts themselves. Following Barthes (1971), I hold that the term “text” implies more than the tangible object of a zine or the digital object of a blog. Rather, texts are forged by authors and readers working in tandem. Barthes uses the metaphor of a network to describe texts because the reader and the author comprise a network through their mutual pursuit of understanding to instantiate the text. Thus, the work of a reader is crucial to a text. Researchers have also used the metaphor of the
network to describe public spaces in which various participants are connected to one another through a web of relationships. For example, social networking web sites such as Facebook and MySpace are networked, in that all participants on the site create and consume content (Boyd, 2007). While this is an important mode of engagement within contemporary culture, in this study I looked at the hermeneutic relationship as a dialectic, as I believe Barthes implies in his use of the term “network.” I chose a hermeneutic approach to revisit the ways in which readers are always a crucial part of the meaning-making process. I take up the productive meaning-making function of the role of reader as implied in the work of Walter Benjamin (1968) and more recently by Paul Willis (1990) and Valerie Walkerdine (2007), who suggest that as consumers of media we are makers of meaning, even through our most passive engagements with these works.

Based on this view of the hermeneutic practice, I wish to demonstrate that educational stakeholders, including teachers and academics, stand to learn about young women’s subjectivities by reading an issue of a zine or a few blog entries in the hermeneutic method that posits the reader’s role as crucial, per Barthes’ networked concept of understanding a text. However, it is important for readers of zines and blogs, particularly those readers who come to the text from powerful social roles such as teacher, professor, or scholar, to approach the texts with a sense that their readings are necessarily partial and the understanding process is one that is never complete. To unpack this approach, a reconsideration of mediated publics is necessary. I turn to Bhabha’s (1994) concept of a third space of enunciation as a space in which meaning can be negotiated while the differences between reader and author can be honored and preserved.
Mediated Publics as Third Spaces

What makes zining and blogging such compelling examples of practices that impact both subjectivities and public discourse is the fact that both take place in mediated publics. A public can be said to be mediated when it is characterized by replicability, or the capacity to be re-created and shared; persistence, or the ability to endure over time; and invisible audiences, or readerships comprised of both known and unknown individuals (Boyd, 2007). I have argued that the latter two qualities are of particular significance to zining and blogging qua literacy and subjectivity practices. Their enduring and public nature makes these texts discursive spaces where their authors may gain recognition from a particular type of audience.

Unlike the recognition that one receives from direct face-to-face engagement with another person or group of people, mediated publics afford a particular kind of recognition that can only happen when a condition of distance is imposed. While Boyd’s (2007) work focuses on the technical aspects of distance, critical theorists measure this distance in terms of how far a reader must travel from her own frame of reference in order to make meaning of the writings of an author. What Bhabha terms a “third space of enunciation” (1994) shares traits with mediated publics but emphasizes the reader’s responsibility to preserve the subjectivity of both reader and author. Bhabha notes that despite an author’s effort to declare her subjectivity through writing, the reader’s act of interpretation is often objectifying. He referred to this difficulty as a problematic of address; although the author invites the reader to the text through publication, she does not necessarily invite the reader to objectify her, use her work to designate her as other, or elide the differences between the reader and herself. He proposes third spaces as spaces where an author and reader may maintain their subjectivity by inhabiting an ambivalent space where the
reader does not allow her meanings to stand as given, therefore allowing the author to stand as an ambiguous subject:

The act of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implications of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot “in itself” be conscious. What this unconscious relation introduces is an ambivalence in the act of interpretation. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 36)

In order for an author to maintain her subjectivity, and for her writing to maintain its authenticity and potency, Bhabha advocates for the passage of both parties through a third space of enunciation where the ambivalence implicit in the act of interpretation may stand. If the author and the reader are to meet as subjects within the space of a text, the reader must do more than acknowledge the partiality of her understanding, as suggested by the hermeneutic project. Bhabha goes further, emphasizing that the role of unconscious meanings must be acknowledged by both the author and the reader.

In order to read zines and blogs within a third space of enunciation, I must do more than acknowledge the power of my position as an academic reader; I must also acknowledge the partiality of my understanding of the subjectivities expressed in the texts, which results from my limitations but also from the unconscious meanings that the author has imbued in the text, to which even she does not have access. While Bhabha’s theory is generated in the field of postcolonial studies, it is also germane to the writings of young women, a group often marginalized or homogenized through academic study. Thus, engagement within a third space is crucial for any academic practice that engages with the writing of youth, who lack the social and
cultural power of their academic readers (Hochman, 2006). Throughout this chapter I work toward meeting these authors in a third space.

While authors cannot possibly fathom the totality of their audience, their work is impacting the discourse on adolescent subjectivity precisely because it is read by these unknown readers who must take their work into account when they consider, or reconsider, discourses of adolescence. I undertake this work with the hope that, by sharing these works with an audience of academic educators, this community might take into account the subjectivities of these young women as we create further work that contributes to academic discourses on young womanhood.

*Engaging Texts: Hermeneutic Methods*

The literature on both zinesters (Duncombe, 2008; Freedman, 2005; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2006) and bloggers (Boyd, 2007; Driscoll & Gregg, 2008; Stefanone & Jang, 2007) notes the importance of the community of peers that develops as a result of these practices. The zinesters in this study articulated the importance of the zine community in print either through referencing other zines\textsuperscript{42} or reviewing zines\textsuperscript{43} within their own zines, or by providing contact information.\textsuperscript{44} All of the bloggers in this study indicated the importance of the blogging community, with the exception of Mimi, who did not welcome comments or participation of any kind in her blog. Of the bloggers, two, Stephanie and Sarah, were linked through comments and are affiliates of one

\textsuperscript{42} Sabrina notes that reading Ciara Xyerra’s zine motivates her to write her own: “This zine is really inspiring to me. I’ve been thinking a lot about zines lately and wanting to make one spur of the moment & this is a rare free night” (Sabrina, p. 2).

\textsuperscript{43} Amber of *Culture Slut* also promotes zine culture by writing zine reviews. She refers to some of the zinesters whose publications she reviews as her friends and communicates with fellow zinesters through letters and email.

\textsuperscript{44} All zinesters in this study provided email addresses, while several provided postal address and social networking information as well.
another’s blogs. While much has been written about the importance of this inter-media community relationship, little has been written on the dialectic generated through the hermeneutic relationship of zines and blogs.

Part of the challenge of reading both zines and blogs had to do with creating a coding scheme that was flexible enough to manage the differences between them but succinct enough to capture the similarities they share as texts. Blogging tends to be a practice sustained over time on one continuous web site, while zines are written in serial form in separate works. I decided to look at zinesters and bloggers who had a sustained writing practice in their chosen medium. In order to argue that their zining and blogging practices constituted important subjectivity work, I looked at materials that showed a sustained dedication to this work over time. This meant using zines written by women who had at least three issues of their zine listed by their distro. For blogs, the process of creating criteria for use in my study was more complicated. I encountered countless blogs with just a handful of entries that had few or no connections to other blogs. In order to ensure that there was enough content to code, I chose blogs that had at least 100 posts and had existed for at least six months and that covered a range of topics relating to the life of the author, according to the coding scheme I developed.

I developed codes based on a preliminary pilot study conducted during the process of researching readings of Antigone. Codes are based on my readings of ten zines and approximately twelve entries each in seven blogs. After generating a large list of themes from these initial readings, I re-read Antigone to generate a list of themes relevant to her story. These

45 Although every issue of their publication was not available for purchase, I used the information available from the distro through which I purchased the zine or the Barnard Zine Collection catalog as evidence that each author was sufficiently prolific to meet my criteria.
initial themes include melancholia, aporia, engagement with community, public/private distinction, and feminism. I then re-examined my large list of codes and compared it to the list of themes from Antigone. There were some connections, but through this process, some additional codes emerged that were prevalent in both the zines and blogs but that had not been apparent to me in my initial reading of Antigone, including invisible audience (or fourth wall), particularity, hope, place, and space. By reading the play and the zines and blogs in concert, I found that there were sufficient connections between these themes and codes to continue with the study. I then created a list of codes to use in the actual study that included all 11 codes, but I left open the possibility that more might emerge.

After this pilot study, I selected the 4 blogs and 5 zines that I would use in this study and began to carefully read them. I read at least 50 entries of each blog (including reader comments, if available). For each blog, I cut and pasted significant quotations or passages into a Microsoft Word document and coded the entries using the list of codes generated by the pilot study. After coding a blog, I read over the quotations and listed themes within that blogger’s writing. I then created a profile based on information in the blog’s “About Me” page, factual information that was given in the entries I read, and my own reflections on the themes I identified in each blog. After reading all 4 blogs, I compared the detailed profiles I wrote and made connections. I then reorganized the data in separate Word documents for a few of the most prevalent codes, including melancholia, public/private distinction, feminism, and invisible audience (a combination of the codes authorship, invisible audience, and fourth wall). To code the zines, I

46 For specific information on blog entry counts and date ranges, see Appendix B.
undertook a similar procedure.\textsuperscript{47} I added the zine data to the existing Word documents on prevalent codes. The categories I will discuss in this chapter and the next emerged through these coding exercises.

Below, I provide some background on the zines and blogs that I read for this study. I use their authors’ first names, as all the bloggers and zinesters are over 18 and are the authors of publicly available works.\textsuperscript{48} The information on the zinesters and bloggers was all found within the texts themselves.\textsuperscript{49} Blogger profiles were developed based on blog entries as well as information provided in their “About Me” pages, which are typically included as a separate section on most blogger’s sites. All the bloggers in this study had an “About Me” page that contained varying amounts of information about the bloggers. The information from zinesters was primarily gathered from the beginning or end of their zines. All of the zinesters in this study provided contact information at the end of their zines. Most zinesters in this study (4 out of 5) began their zines with a preamble that defined the zine’s tone or identified a theme for the issue. Personal information about the author was often available through these preambles.

\textit{Blogger profiles}. Bloggers blog about a multitude of topics, as I discussed in Chapter Three, yet all blogs used in this study primarily contained entries about the authors’ daily experiences and thoughts. One blogger, Mimi, wrote a number of entries that included only poems; however, her poetry is often introspective. The genre of writing and the method with which the blogs were written was distinct, and my descriptions below reflect this range. The

\textsuperscript{47} For specific information on zine coding, see Appendix C.

\textsuperscript{48} Citations for each text can be found in the bibliography as well as in the tables in Appendices B and C.

\textsuperscript{49} One zinester, Katie of \textit{Aubade}, did not provide her name on her zine, but it was associated with the zine on the distro site from which it was purchased.
content is also quite varied from entry to entry on each individual blog. Only one blog out of four articulated a theme; however, in my descriptions of the blogs I attempt to provide some sense of the themes that unify the content of each blog, based on the 50 or so entries I read.

Lizzie is the blogger behind *Diary of a Fat Teenager*. She is a White college student who grew up and now goes to college on the East Coast. She began her blog in high school in December 2007, and her content production began to wane until she ultimately abandoned it in the fall of 2009. I read entries that spanned June 2008 through June 2009, when Lizzie was between 18 and 19 years old. The blog began as a project to raise awareness about fat acceptance and posit herself as a role model for other fat young women. Lizzie wrote about coping with daily life as a heavy teenager and young woman; she posted about images of women in the media, her own struggles with her body image, and responses to provocative or pitying comments she receives on her blog, often posted by “trolls,” or people who derive pleasure from posting cruel comments on blogs in hopes of either undermining the blogger’s original post or flaring heated debate or discussion within blog comments. As such, one of the standout elements of Lizzie’s blog was her comment rules, in which she declares her blog her own space where she has the last word in whose comments will be posted.

Sarah Elizabeth is a White community college student who lives with her grandmother and next door to her mother, stepfather, and siblings in rural Texas. She began her blog, *6Birds*, in February 2010; however, she notes that she maintains several other blogs. I read entries from February 2010 to February 2011, when she was between 19 and 20 years old. Her blogging covers her other online projects, including web design and site hosting, and documents her day-to-day life on a farm. It is very important to Sarah that her readers are able to follow her blog,
and one of its unique features is a glossary of people and places she references frequently in her posts. Sarah also writes about blogging memes, or popular blogging topics that spread virally between blogs or web sites. Thus, many of her entries are responses to questionnaires that other bloggers within her circle of bloggers, known as affiliates, have also written about.

Mimi writes a blog that changed names three times during the research period, from *Ilykemeatpie* to *A Beautiful Trainwreck* to *Oh, We’re Living La Dolce Vita*. She began her blog as a high school student in 2007, but the entries I read for this study spanned July 2009 to July 2010, when she was a 19- to 20-year-old college student. Mimi is Asian American and lives in a college town in Texas. Mimi deleted her blog twice during the research period, most recently in March 2011. She also disabled the comments on her blog and removed the ability to follow her posts through an RSS feed over the course of the research period. Her blog began as reports on her daily activities, but gradually became more opaque until it became almost entirely poetry. An aspiring writer, Mimi also blogs a great deal about her writing practice offline.

Stephanie, the author of *Wooty Woot*, is also an Asian American college student; she attends a competitive engineering school in California and is 19 years old. She does not provide information about where she grew up. She started *Wooty Woot* in April 2010, although she notes that she blogged extensively in high school. I read blog entries that spanned April 2010 to December 2010. Stephanie is an extremely prolific blogger who blogs almost every day. She devotes more entries than other bloggers to the technical aspects of blogging, such as changing her layout, coding and finding host sites. She is unique within the sample for being the only blogger who acknowledges the fact that she has prewritten many of her entries, months in

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50 At the time of this writing, Mimi’s blog is no longer online.
advance, prior to posting them. Therefore, her entries about everyday life are often about memories, a practice more common among zinesters, and only rarely do entries respond to current events in her life.

*Zinester profiles.* Zines are written in issues, as opposed to one continuous text, like a blog. Many issues are organized around a theme, and many have a subtitle that reflects that theme. For example, Amber, author of *Culture Slut*, was selling the “Polaroid Issue” of her zine through her distro at the same time that Issue #19, an unnamed issue, was available for purchase. I chose Issue #19, published in Spring 2009, which does not have a subtitle. However, Amber writes in her preamble that it is informally a coming-out issue. Zines vary tremendously in writing style from zinester to zinester. For example, Danielle, who writes *Cherry Blossom*, *Cherry Pie* and Katie of *Aubade* both write polished essays, while Sabrina of *Four Horsemen* has a more stream-of-consciousness style. Amber’s zine is a pastiche of her own writing, images, and text photocopied from old textbooks. In what follows, I attempt to capture the unique writing styles and thematic subjects of the 5 zinesters included in this study.

As mentioned above, Amber writes the zine *Culture Slut*; issue #19 is her coming-out issue. She uses short essays on memories of her first sexual experiences spliced with images and text from mid-century textbooks in order to create this issue, which reflects on her queer identity. Her writing covers topics including sexual assault, coming out, her struggle to identify as queer, and relationships with men. The zine is a mixture of recollections and reflections on childhood memories and her current life, and her zine frequently acknowledges both the importance of her zining practice and the aporia that results from this work. Amber is a 20-something Canadian
woman. She is from a small town in Ontario but at the writing of issue #19 had recently moved to Montreal, Quebec. From pictures in her zine, Amber appears to be White.

Katie, author of *Aubade,* entitled her fourth issue “The Virginia Issue.” Katie is a college graduate who lives in the D.C. area and wrote this zine at age 22 on the eve of her move away from her home state of Virginia in May 2008. She looks back on her life in this state where she grew up and went to college. Her essays span the years between her first childhood memories of living in a small Virginia town, through high school and college, on to her first experiences living on her own. She reflects on the changes that have taken place in both the small towns of Virginia that have evolved into suburbs and her own life.

Sabrina also zines about coming of age in *Four Horsemen* #3. The zine is not a themed issue, but it is unique in its declaration that it was written over the course of one week in March of 2008 when she was 20 years old. As a single mother who attends community college and lives with her parents, Sabrina writes about the difficulties of finding time to zine. Sabrina’s zine is characterized by a conversational writing style and an extremely optimistic tone. She derives inspiration from her studies in school as well as from another zine she is reading, and models several entries after this zinester’s work. The subject matter of this issue of *Four Horsemen* is varied, ranging from a recipe for pancakes to a meditation on the music of Bruce Springsteen to a story about an argument with her son’s father, yet is unified by her hopeful voice.

Danielle is an Asian American young woman living in San Francisco. Her second issue of *Cherry Blossom, Cherry Pie,* published in 2006, is a collection of short essays on memories from her childhood and teen years growing up in Southern California that focus on the

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51 Katie provides on information on her race or ethnicity in this zine.
52 Sabrina does not refer to her race or ethnicity in any of her writings.
intersection of race and gender. Like Amber, she moves back and forth between memories of her childhood and vignettes of her present-day life; however, her focus is strongly rooted in the past. Her writing is a combination of polished essays about her childhood and shorter pieces about her present-day life in San Francisco.

When wrote her sixth issue of her zine *Regeneration* in the winter of 2009, she was a 19-year-old young woman living and working as a waitress and barista in St. Paul, Minnesota. The issue chronicles her first year of living on her own, which took about four years prior to the issue’s composition. She describes several romantic relationships with men, one female best friend, and a great deal of drug and alcohol use. Of the 5 zines, Ashlee’s is the only one that follows a chronological narrative format, and she writes in a very documentary style. From images in the zine, she appears to be White.

The zinesters and bloggers in this study covered a range of topics in a variety of writing styles. However, in each case, the articulation of the author’s particularities within these mediated public spaces serves as a form of inquiry and a questioning of the status quo. In sharing their particular stories, these young women disrupt the narratives proposed by hegemonic discourses of young womanhood through their participation in these public spaces. In the next section, I will explore the ways in which the writing of zinesters and bloggers questions and ultimately destabilizes dominant discourses of young womanhood.

***III. Zining and Blogging toward Third Space***

As I argued in Chapter Three, zinesters and bloggers undertake their writing practices within mediated public spaces in order to be recognized. The recognition that they earn in these
spaces is unique from other forms of recognition due to the affordances of mediated publics: Their writing persists in these spaces over time and they engage with invisible audiences, consisting of people who are both known and unknown to them. The fact that they participate in these spaces indicates that they want to make their stories public. However, as I have also argued, mediated publics offer another form of mediation, which is the opportunity to engage with a reader in a third space, where the subjectivity of both the reader and the author may remain intact. While such engagements require work on the part of both the reader and the author, they are possible. In this section, I will argue that the zinesters and bloggers in this study do invite the reader to the text in a manner that indicates their openness to engagement within a third space of enunciation.

I will also argue that the young women in this study use their zines and blogs as spaces of questioning and inquiry. By writing within mediated public spaces, both groups invite readers to engage with them in questioning, and with their questions. In what follows, I will describe the ways in which young women use their zines and blogs to posit identities, but also to question those identities. Further, they invite their readers to question identity categories by conducting this inquiry in a mediated public space but also through conscious and unconscious invitations to the reader to join them in their questioning.

“Shout It Out”: Acts through Language

After burying Polynices, Antigone is driven to speak about her act on multiple occasions (Butler, 2000). In the opening scene of the play, she tells her sister Ismene that her act should be publicly discussed: “Oh, oh, no! shout it out. I will hate you still worse for silence—should you
not proclaim it, to everyone” (Lattimore, trans., ll. 99-100, p. 164). Later, she tells Creon, “Yes, I confess, I do not deny my deed” (Lattimore, trans., l. 487, p. 178). In both cases, it is clear that the public act committed through language is just as important as the deeds it describes.

Antigone acknowledges the fact that she must speak about this act, demonstrating that it is not enough merely to act; through her remarks about her act and her remarks about speaking about the act, she gestures toward issues larger than the burial of her brother, indicating that she desires recognition for something greater than this act alone. Moreover, the fact that she wants Ismene to speak about the act as well indicates that she wants the act to become part of public discourse.

Like Antigone, the zinesters and bloggers in this study need to tell their stories in order to instantiate new acts through language. For example, Amber, who writes the zine *Culture Slut*, uses issue #19 as a coming-out issue. She has not come out to many people in her life, and for her this zine is the act of coming out publicly, thus instantiating the act of coming out through the writing in her zine. The fact that the zine is a mediated public space means that her coming out in the zine is recognized by others, even if that audience is comprised primarily of strangers and other zinesters. However, unlike Antigone, these young women instantiate their acts in mediated public spaces, where it is possible to meet a reader in a third space of enunciation. While these young women invite readers to engage with them, they are ambivalent about whether they will receive the recognition they desire from readers. These concerns indicate that these young women wish to engage with readers in a third space of enunciation.
“I’ve Dealt with a Ton of Doubt”

One of the codes that developed through my readings practice was *fourth wall*, which I used to indicate that the author spoke directly to the reader. This code seemed to arise on occasions when authors were addressing their audience in a way that drew them into the zine in an intimate way, as if the reader were an old friend with whom they needed to catch up. For example, in the preamble to her zine Amber instructs her reader, “Now go pour yourself a cup of tea or a glass of wine, sit down and enjoy” (*Culture Slut* #19, p. 1).

However, this code also applied to many instances in which the zinesters or bloggers articulated the difficulty of putting such intimate thoughts into writing. Prior to this invitation from Amber, she acknowledges that writing issue #19 has not been easy, in part because it addresses her queer identity, something that she has not shared with many people. By writing her zine, Amber acknowledges that public declaration is important in order to be recognized as queer, yet her zine is the one place where she can “shout it out” as a subject who will engage with readers in a third space where that subjectivity is maintained.

Ashlee articulates a similar difficulty. Her zine *Regeneration* #6 chronicles her first several years of living on her own. Ashlee overtly addresses her invisible audience when she writes, “I’ve dealt with a ton of doubt over whether anyone will want to read these stories or if it’ll only mean something to the people who lived through it with me” (p. 29). Ashlee’s question indicates that she too invites readers into a third space of enunciation where she may be recognized as a subject who needs to publicly tell her stories.

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53 Ashlee (2009), *Regeneration* #6, p. 29.
Mimi, the blogger of *We’re Living La Dolce Vita*, often writes entries to a particular yet unnamed individual. For example, as she prepares to leave for college, she writes:

> It's crazy how fast time is speeding. I feel like I'm in a rush to say my last farewells this week. I should have done it a long time ago. I'm watching the airplanes take off, one by one. I'll pretend to act indifferent, just for you. (August 8, 2009, “Mod Gal, Fifties to Sixties”)

It is unclear who the “you” is in this statement; however, as Bhabha (1994) notes, within third spaces, the designated “you” is seldom the only recipient of the communication. While Mimi may not be directly addressing her reader, she still makes public the fact that she is pretending at indifference for someone other than herself when in fact she is rushing to say goodbye. As a reader, we see beyond the indifference that she cannot share outside her blog. Mimi’s indifference seems to be directed more toward the reader, whom she allows to eavesdrop on her true feelings, yet the fact that she puts this information online indicates that she, like Amber and Ashlee, wants to be recognized within a third space as a subject.

Both Ashlee and Amber’s address of the fourth wall seem to be tentative but earnest invitations to the reader to meet them in a third space of enunciation. This ambivalence about whether anyone will read or care about their zining practices is a statement of understanding not only that zining is a public act, but also that it is a personal one that requires a reader to engage with the author as a subject in process. These zinesters express concern about whether and how they can call on hermeneutic readers in order to gain the type of recognition that their work suggests they seek from a mediated public. This questioning is also present in their expressions of identity within their writing practices.
“It Begs Questions”54: Articulating and Questioning Identities

Literary theorists note that practices such as zining and blogging are important because they are spaces where young people can articulate and question identities (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004; Lankshear & Knobel, 2002). The zinesters and bloggers in this study confirm this theory. Here, I examine the work of Amber, who zines about being queer; and Lizzie, who blogs about being heavy in her fat acceptance blog. Both declare an identity through their writing yet question these identities. While they acknowledge hegemonic discourses around sexuality and body weight and the impacts they have on their lives, they attempt to position themselves outside the binaries that these discourses offer and invite their readers to participate in this work.

In Culture Slut #19, Amber writes about her queer identity. As a woman who has romantic relationships with men and currently lives with a male partner, she eschews the term “bisexual,” stating, “I don’t want to be that girl. I’m strange. I’m queer” (Amber, Culture Slut #19, p. 18). Rather than being “that girl,” Amber wants to tell her own story, not a stereotypical one. She views the word “queer” as “slightly confusing. It begs questions. It’s open to interpretation. It brings freedom” (p. 13). Amber describes her identification as queer as a way of remaining ambiguous in her identity and maintaining a questioning stance. Her statement implies that she wants to remain ambiguous to her readers as well, and free from the constraints of categorization. Through her writing, Amber indicates to her reader that she does not want to be easily interpreted through the available categories of gay, straight, and bisexual; she wants to both cause us to question and question herself.

54 Amber (2009), Culture Slut #19, p. 13.
By using the word “queer,” Amber has claimed an identity, which is something she is not as comfortable doing in her life outside the zine. She never discusses her identity with her twin sister, with whom she is very close and who is also queer. She writes,

Because really, who wants to hear about their sibling’s sex life? It’s weird. But I’m hoping that this is just a phase. Right now, we’re young and shy. Perhaps as we become older and more comfortable (with our bodies, our beliefs and our lives) we will be able to share our stories with each other. (Amber, Culture Slut #19, p. 21)

Through her zining practice, Amber is able to declare herself to be queer yet also question the role of queerness in her life, which is something she is not comfortable doing in other spaces. Amber expresses the fact that this tension is too difficult to maintain in relationships with her friends and family, yet her ability to write about her queerness and her ambivalence about disclosing her queerness is only possible for her within the zine. This ambivalence can inhabit her zine, and as readers we may engage with her as such within a third space of enunciation, as Bhabha (1994) suggests. Therefore, the zining practice provides a unique opportunity for readers who accept her invitation to join her in this work to recognize Amber as both queer and questioning. Our engagement with Amber in the third space of enunciation allows us to recognize her experience as particular, yet also to bring her questioning to our own inquiry, which may in turn impact other, more general discourses on queerness and identity.

In her fat acceptance blog, Lizzie writes against a hegemonic perception of fat people yet also struggles to maintain the identity she has claimed for herself as a self-confident advocate. In her “About Me” page, Lizzie describes the mission of her blog as spreading a fat-positive message to other young people. She describes herself as “a proud fat girl who is going to wear her bikini(s) to the beach, much to the unhappiness of haters, because I love the way the ocean
feels against my bare stomach” (Lizzie, “About Me”). She posts pictures of herself wearing bikinis and encourages other young women to do the same. However, many of Lizzie’s entries describe her coming to terms with the difficulties of maintaining the happy fat girl identity. In the quote below, she expresses doubt about her blogging practice as true to her mission:

I also kinda hate that this blog is pretty much just me rambling about myself. I mean, I guess that’s okay, but I feel selfish for it (and also kind of wonder why people would want to read my wandering thoughts). I guess I feel kinda like a gimmick—the blogger who’s fat and a teenager. (Diary of a Fat Teenager, June 6, 2009, “…I’m Still Alive…”).

Lizzie wonders aloud whether she has become a counternarrative, the foil to the teenager who is weight obsessed, and has herself become a commodity: the fat teenage blogger. On the other hand, she is also concerned that she is too self-important, fulfilling the trope of the solipsistic teenager.

Through her blog, Lizzie is struggling to be a particular young woman and not just a counter story to the American obsession with thinness. Although her blog is linked to some of the most prestigious blogs in the fat acceptance online community (known as the “fatosphere”), she indicates even through her URL (lovemformexoxo.com) that she wants to be known as a particular person and not just “the fat teenage blogger.” The fact that she feels guilty about expressing the banalities of this particularity on her own blog is part of her struggle to define herself while at the same time using her blogging practice to question this identity. The above passage indicates that Lizzie has doubt about whether it is tenable to inhabit the role of the “happy fat girl” all the time. Within the third space of enunciation, this process of struggling with her identity is palpable to the reader.
The struggle to reconcile her particularity with the larger social context underscores the extent to which all subject positions are necessarily contingent (Beauvoir, 1974; Butler 1990). Lizzie’s social context impacts her subjectivity, and although she claims the identity of the “happy fat girl” she relies on the space of the blog as one where she can question this identity and articulate its challenges in a potential third space, where readers may engage with her work in a manner that acknowledges that their understandings and hers are also always in process.

*Explaining the Need to Explain*

The zinesters and bloggers in this study need to explain not only the details of their lives but also the need to explain. This reflection on their writing practices deepens their engagement with their readers as it provides some insight into their motivations. This window on their process also demonstrates the fact that their writing practices are always in process and that the meanings they make here are necessarily partial.

As mentioned above, Amber is ambivalent about whether to confide in her sister about her queer identity. At the end of this essay, she notes, “The whole thing is a process for me. I’m still learning. I’m figuring out who to tell and how to say it. Sometimes the only way I know to go about things is to write about it in a zine” (Culture Slut #19, p. 20-21). Here, Amber refers to the fact that learning about her queer identity and disclosing that identity is a process, and zining is an integral part of that process. She uses her zine as a place to reflect on her past and consider future actions, but she also reflects on the role that zining plays in that process. Amber articulates in this quote that zining is part of her learning process, and that at times, before she undertakes an act in her life, she considers it in her zine. This reflection on the role that zining plays in her
process also designates her zining practice as an ongoing process of inquiry. By inviting readers into this process, we have the opportunity to engage in this questioning process with Amber.

In her zine, *Regeneration* #6, Ashlee notes that there is something important about publicly articulating her stories in order to clear a space for future acts: “I feel like I had to document these years of my life before I could move on and write about today” (*Regeneration* #6, p. 29). For Ashlee, like Amber, her work is a process, and part of this process is the act of publicly rendering these experiences through language, an act that in itself engages her with a different set of interlocutors than her life outside the zine provides. In order to move forward in her life, Ashlee had to write about these experiences, but also needs to explain this need to her reader.

*Zining and blogging as therapy.* Some zinesters and bloggers regard their practices as therapeutic, though they define the term in different ways. For example, Mimi, the blogger of *We’re Living La Dolce Vita*, describes her blog as a space where she can discharge frustrations: “But it's nice that I don't rant on and on. I rather write my feelings on my blog or notebook. It's better than telling someone my problems. I get into a lot of trouble for that. I'm getting better at keeping things to myself now” (*We’re Living La Dolce Vita*, Monday, July 27, 2009, “I Hate Driving School”). Mimi notes that she can rant to her blog rather than a friend, and she likens this practice to keeping her feelings to herself. This is an interesting claim in light of the fact that Mimi is keeping things to herself in a publicly available online space. Here, Mimi expresses the importance of engaging with a mediated public, where there is some acknowledgement from someone other than herself that she has unburdened herself of these feelings, but also, perhaps more importantly, that she is recognized for having these feelings.
Like Mimi, Sarah describes blogging as therapeutic; however, she views the blog as an escape into a new community:

If you could step into my shoes you would see that blogging keeps me sane. For me, it is free therapy. While that I did not blog I felt like I was going to explode; I felt like I was alone. Blogging helps me know that I’m not alone in what goes on in my life. It lets me know that everything is going to be okay. It isn’t an addiction; it is an escape. The more that I blog just shows how much more I need to share and see what others say. In a way, the previous sentence sounds weird. But I guess you would have to step into my shoes to understand it—if you don’t already. (6Birds, October 13, 2010, “In My Shoes”)

Blogging helps Sarah realize the importance of sharing her thoughts through writing within a mediated public. This passage gets to the heart of public literacy practices and indicates the importance of engaging with others. For Sarah, the invisible audience is crucial, and she is conscious of this fact; Mimi regards the audience as incidental. As Sarah notes, the more she blogs, the more she realizes that blogging constitutes engaging in a dialectic with her audience, through which she wants to share and receive feedback. However, she also indicates that those in the best position to understand her are other bloggers. Sarah invites her readers to step into her shoes, and while she recognizes that this is an odd request, she also wonders if some of her readers aren’t in her shoes, so to speak, already. While Bhabha (1994) notes that within a third space we do not inhabit the subjectivities of others, readers and authors will have differences and connections, and Sarah acknowledges that her readership is comprised of such a diverse and unknown group.

As mentioned above, Lizzie is ambivalent about using her blog as a space where she can problematize the role of “happy fat girl” she has designated for herself. She refers to her blog as therapeutic when she “vents” to her reader in a way that does not suggest that she is secure in

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55 In addition to Sarah and Mimi, Lizzie describes blogging as therapeutic.
this role. One such declaration of the blog as therapeutic occurs when Lizzie is assigned a group project in a college nutrition course. Her group discusses a project on obesity, which makes Lizzie very uncomfortable. Although she agrees to this topic, after the group meeting she writes an entry about her strong feelings against the topic and decides to write an email to her group about her reservations as a result of blogging. At the end of this entry she writes, “Wow—sorry that this blog entry is like a personal therapy session (with me being the patient or whatever the term is)...I guess I just have to let out my feelings here” (Lizzie, *Diary of a Fat Teenager*, January 23, 2009, “So I Sent an Email…”).

Lizzie clearly wants to be recognized as a subject through her blogging practice, but she seems to feel guilty about being *the* subject of her blog. This may be related not only to her ambivalence about sharing her personal thoughts in public, but also to the fact that she has placed herself in the role of inspirational figure within this blog. By designating herself as a “happy fat girl,” Lizzie identifies to some extent with the can-do ethos of the Girl Power discourse, which suggests that young women are capable of creating their own identities. However, Lizzie’s ambivalence about the happy fat girl role suggests that she is using her blog to problematize this hegemonic discourse, despite her engagement with it. Thus, Lizzie is somewhat tentative about the therapeutic function of her blog, but like Mimi and Sarah, her use of the term implies questioning and inquiry. Lizzie’s problematizing of the happy fat girl role also demonstrates that even when young women engage with hegemonic discourses, they can take a questioning stance rather than one of blind acquiescence.

By publishing zines and blogs, the authors in this study invite readers to their texts. However, through the discussion of their methods and why they blog or zine, they extend a
particular kind of invitation that invites us to inhabit a third space with them. By approaching this work with a sense of questioning these zinesters and bloggers recognize the partiality of their understandings and invite us to join them in this ambivalent space of interpretation (Bhabha, 1994). In the next section, I will explore the ways in which zines and blogs are not only ambivalent spaces of encounter between reader and author but also blur the boundaries between public and private, reality and fantasy, toward becoming hybrid spaces.

**IV. Hybrid Spaces: Zines and Blogs Challenging Boundaries**

*Hybrid Spaces*

In this section, I will discuss the role of hybrid space, or the blurring of boundaries between public and private, reality and fantasy, within zining and blogging and the dialectics they have with their readers. This blurring occurs within print texts and television (Burgin, 1994); however, as the Internet has become an increasingly ubiquitous space in 21st-century life, the conversation has turned toward the boundary between online and offline spaces. Early research on participation in online practices suggested that part of the appeal was the ability to manipulate one’s identity, or to try on different identities in this new space (Turkle, 1995). However, research on young people’s participation online has shown that this is not the norm. Rather than escaping their “real lives,” young people are integrating their social lives in face-to-face and online spaces. A great deal of evidence from the social sciences has suggested that the more we communicate and express ourselves online, the less we differentiate experiences online from face-to-face ones (Boyd, 2009; Driscoll, 2008; Harris, 2008; Hodkinson & Lincoln, 2008). However, this distinction is not new within the field of cultural studies. After reading a
newspaper article about riots in a Paris suburb, Victor Burgin (1996) posited the notion of “hybrid spaces.” In the article, a teacher noted that her students “make no distinction between the world of the street, of television, and the school” (Burgin, 1996, p. 29). Burgin notes that such spaces are comprised of our lived realities, but also of the stories that touch our lives as we move back and forth between engagements through texts and face to face. Thus, within hybrid spaces, the stories of others also form a component of our lived realities.

Walkerdine (2007) also argues for a concept of hybrid space that suggests our fantasy lives are a function of our lived experiences that dictate the content of these fantasies. She critiqued the strict distinction between “fantasy” life online and face-to-face encounters, or “real life,” within her studies of video gaming practices. She advocated the position that fantasy does not develop in a vacuum; rather, it develops within our social and cultural contexts and is implicit in our everyday practices. Walkerdine asks how one can combine this notion with the work that occurs through the gaming process, noting that it, too, is inscribed in these social and cultural patterns. Her argument that meanings are not only made actively also suggests that our fantasies are influenced by our real life contexts in ways that are beyond even our own understandings.

The zines and blogs I read suggest that while young people are thinking about the distinctions between real life and their zining or blogging practices, they also articulate a necessary relationship between the two. As their writing demonstrates, young women’s literacy practices within mediated publics are constitutive of hybrid spaces in that they question the boundaries not only between fantasy and reality, but also between public and private, the personal and the social and political. Reader participation provides the recognition that zinesters
and bloggers seek though their writing practices, yet it also serves to shape the space where this recognition is provided. Within hybrid spaces, both reader and writer are producers and consumers of meaning and contribute to the pastiche of meanings that are made there. Below, I will explore the ways in which these bloggers and zinesters articulate a sense of hybrid space through discussions of fantasy and reality and through speaking to and about their invisible audiences. When readers and authors meet in hybrid spaces toward creating third spaces of enunciation, both are in a position to articulate and question subjectivities, but also to re-negotiate the boundaries where this dialectic takes place.

“...Struggling to Carve Out a Place”56: Toward Hybrid Spaces

Because of the different affordances of zines and blogs, each occupies a different physical space. Zines are published in print booklet form, while blogs are published online. Each of these physical spaces contributes to the ways in which their authors conceive of hybrid spaces through their work in their medium. While the bloggers’ discussion of the unique space of blogging often turns on the distinction between online and offline lives or their problematizing of this distinction, zinesters articulate the importance of zines as a space where fiction and reality may meet. Both, however, contribute to the sense of hybrid space that these mediated publics can instantiate for both readers and authors.

The zinester Katie provides some insight into the both zinesters’ and bloggers’ hybrid concept of space, noting that it is a space that they are drawn to and that they contribute to shaping. In her introduction to Aubade #4, she says of her zine, “It’s about preserving the places

56 Katie (2008), Aubade #4, p. 3.
we love—real and imagined. It’s about struggling to carve out those places in spite of the enormous obstacles standing in our way…Of course, of course, everything is a metaphor” (Katie, *Aubade* #4, pp. 2-3). Katie describes the process of carving out a space, both within her zine and metaphorically within her life, using her zine as a space where this work can take place. This struggle to carve a space out of one’s literacy practice is a theme that emerged in both zines and blogs.

Lizzie, for example, also struggles to carve her blog out as a space where she can write about fat acceptance; however, as discussed above, her blog is also a space where she questions her own body image. While Lizzie wants public engagement through her blogging practice, she also institutes comment rules on her blog as a way of coping with trolls. One rule from this policy designates the blog as Lizzie’s forum:

**Fourth rule: If you even fucking mention “free speech” with regard to this comments policy, you will be banned… [author’s emphasis]** If you want to speak freely, the fine folks at [WordPress](http://kateharding.net/comments-policy/) will be happy to provide you with the exact same kind of platform I use. But if you want to play in my sandbox, you need to not piss me off. (Lizzie, *Diary of a Fat Teenager*, Comment Rules).

By implementing this comment policy, Lizzie is acknowledging that her blog is not a democratic public space. Rather, it is *her blog*; others may participate, but ultimately it is her forum. Rather than allowing comments to be posted directly, she must approve all comments before they appear on the blog. Her proprietary sense of the blog extends to all content, not only her own writing, as she notes when she responds to a reader who is upset with her for not approving their comments: “Can I just say (actually, I can, it’s my blog)...THAT THIS IS MY BLOG!

Why do people have such a hard time accepting that? Look, the world’s not ending because I

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57 Lizzie takes her comment rules from the blog *Shapely Prose* by Kate Harding (http://kateharding.net/comments-policy/).
didn’t approve your comment” (Lizzie, *Diary of a Fat Teenager*, July 3, 2008, “I’m a Preachy Future Montel Commercial, BITCH!”) Here, Lizzie challenges the public–private distinction with her acknowledgment that although her blog is publicly accessible, she views it as her own space. As Katie, the zinester of *Aubade*, suggests, Lizzie is attempting to shape her blog as space for her subjectivity work with these comment rules. The fact that Lizzie calls for recognition of her subjectivity as well as affirmation from her commentors can be read as an attempt to preserve her subjectivity. Lizzie’s claim upon her space designates it as a hybrid space; although it is a public space online, she feels that it is hers and therefore that she should control its content. In order to engage with Lizzie in a third space, the reader must keep in mind that the assessment of her comments is part of the inquiry that takes place within the space of her blog. Lizzie assumes the role of reader of her own blog; however, she does not view the comments as a third space, since she chooses who remains a subject on her blog. Lizzie’s blog demonstrates the movement between roles, but it also demonstrates that all blogs are not third spaces. While as a reader I may enter a third space with Lizzie, the affordances of the blog make it easy for her to refuse to join me in a third space if I participate in a way she does not like. Lizzie’s blog underscores the ways in which third spaces online are thus particularly fragile and contingent, since the asynchronous qualities of paper-based texts are not a necessity. She also demonstrates the ways in which authors online may attempt to insist upon recognition as subjects despite the fact that all readers and participants may not meet them in a third space. On her own blog, Lizzie has the power to delete these comments, but as her writing demonstrates, she is not able to delete them from her continued inquiry into her subjectivity that takes place there.
“I’m Split in Two”\textsuperscript{58}: Bridging Online and Offline

In her post “Split in Two” (August 15, 2008), Lizzie describes her concern about the boundaries between her life offline and online. In this entry, she articulates a desire for a space that can accommodate the two:

I’m not really sure how to start this, but I just feel like sometimes I am two different people. Like there are two different [sic] sides to me.

Maybe that’s one of the reasons I love my blog—it lets me say what I want to say to people who want to hear it. No one in my family wants to hear about issues of women or race or anything. We just don’t talk about that kind of stuff. (Sometimes I feel that if we ever did though, I would not be able to say what I mean the right way. It’s hard to do). There are some thoughts that I don’t blog about on here either, because I am worried of what my IRL friends would think. I don’t like to think I am that radical or anything, because compared to others involved I’m really not, but compared to the people around me I feel like I am. (Lizzie, \textit{Diary of a Fat Teenager}, August 15, 2008, “Split in Two”)

Here, Lizzie demonstrates her genuine concern about the divide that she senses between her life online and offline. In each space, her freedom is curtailed in part by the conventions of the groups of which she is part in each space, but also by the ways in which she has internalized the community’s norms. Butler (1997) describes this as the ways in which the social is instantiated as a regulatory ideal that creates the conditions under which we may act but also limits the acts we may take in order to operate within the restrictions of society. Life online adds further complexity to these norms. Online Lizzie cannot hide her fat acceptance politics, and through her comment policy she recognizes at least unconsciously that offline social norms are being recapitulated on the web, even if she has found a supportive niche online. In both spaces, she feels slightly compromised. Her awareness of this tension shows ambivalence about her

\textsuperscript{58} Lizzie, \textit{Diary of a Fat Teenager}, August 15, 2008.
blogging practice and again demonstrates that her blog is a space of negotiation and questioning that, although imperfect, constitutes a hybrid space.

Sarah of the 6Birds blog also problematizes the public–private distinction through her blogging and establishes her blog as a hybrid space in a manner that, similar to Lizzie’s, involves questioning within the blog about the nature of the space. Sarah is well aware of the fact that once her blogging leaves her hands, it can be read by anyone; she acknowledges her invisible audience. In an entry responding to a meme that asks bloggers to respond to a list of ten questions about their blogs, she writes, “It is open to whomever wishes to read it. I don’t see the point in trying to keep it secret when nothing is private anymore once it goes online” (Sarah, 6Birds, December 7, 2010, “Questions for Bloggers”). Although Sarah views her blog as a mediated public space with an invisible audience, she still holds on to a sense that it is somehow separate from her offline life. She maintains two separate Facebook profiles, one for online friends and one for offline friends. While she wants to parse categories simply, dividing the world into online and offline relationships, her desire to have separate spaces does not diminish her understanding of her blog as a mediated public. She articulates this by inviting her readers to engage with stories from her real life by helping them understand its terms. Sarah provides a glossary for her readers that includes descriptions of people and places she mentions frequently in her blog. She also creates mouse-overs in her entries, so if a reader passes a mouse over a particular name, a description of that person’s relationship to Sarah will appear as a pop-up.

Although she wants to parse public and private, Sarah’s own blogging serves to destabilize that strict division. She ultimately acknowledges that her blog is central to her well-being both online and offline. In the entry quoted in the previous section, “In My Shoes,” Sarah
says her blogging practice “helps [her] know [she’s] not alone in what goes on in [her] life” (Sarah, October 13, 2010). She also notes that blogging causes her to realize that she needs to blog more, acknowledging the inquiry that occurs in her blog. In this entry, Sarah’s articulation of the connection that her blog has to her real life indicates that she, too, is carving out the blog as a hybrid space, and her parsing of categories is part of an inquiry process that involves knitting them back together, which is work she does at least in part on her blog, with her readers.

Mimi clearly views her blog as a distinct space from her real life, and goes so far as to indicate that blogging is in some ways holding her back from participating in her life offline. In multiple entries, she declares that she wants to give up blogging, only to return to her blog days or weeks later. She writes in one such dismissal of her blog, “I love you but I'm ready to love the world for good. I am done with you” (Mimi, We’re Living La Dolce Vita, July 19, 2009, untitled). Mimi’s blog–world distinction alludes to the possibility that her blog is a respite from the world, and yet, like Lizzie, she is critical of herself for needing this space of questioning.

As a reader, one gets the sense that Mimi’s blog is a very internal document, written to herself. She has disabled comments on her blog as well as the ability to follow her, so there is no interactivity beyond readership available. Over time, Mimi’s posts become gradually more esoteric, often taking the form of poems, vignettes of writing, or somewhat decontextualized reflections. Mimi’s blog is public, but it is an online public space that does not allow feedback from her readers, which makes it unique from other blogs in this study and more like a zine. As a reader, I found that her blog had zine-like qualities, in that her writing was more stream-of-consciousness, creative, and opaque than that of the other bloggers in the study, who tended to chronicle their lives and interpret what they shared. Mimi’s blog ensures the ambivalence of
interpretation by preserving the asynchronous quality of paper-based writing. Mimi’s writing style also speaks to the blurring of the boundaries between reality and fantasy within hybrid spaces.

“Slipping into the Fantasy\(^59\)”: Destabilizing Reality and Fantasy

Mimi’s blog is unique among the blogs in this study in its focus on destabilizing the boundaries between reality and fantasy in addition to those between public and private. Her intermingling of stories from her life with fiction adds another dimension to the notion of hybrid spaces where multiple stories, multiple truths, and subsequently multiple subjectivities may be produced. Her work asks us to question the degree to which fiction is a part of all accounts of one’s life and memories.

For example, Mimi’s blog is filled with poetry and vignettes of prose writing given without context. In this entry, she describes a night in a hookah bar with friends through writerly prose. As she sets a scene of decadence, she also describes her loss of inhibitions in that moment:

I almost dreamed of being an Arabic princess, wrapped in silk gowns and with my body embossed in elegant henna tattoos. Shutting my eyelids, auspicious smoke consumed my lungs and there was a gentle feeling of flavored tobacco exhaling out of my nose. A girls' night out at a college hookah bar, transcending into a flight of fancy and heavenly rush…I was addicted to the smell of confidence, not wary of my newfound and unlikely adult personality as I began to tease the hell out of some cute stranger that I had barely met an hour ago. I had to prove to myself that I was more than the little girl that carried weight on top of her shoulders and tainted hearts on her sleeves.

However, to conclude the passage, Mimi reflects on her writing practice. Rather than focusing on the confidence she felt with her friends at the hookah bar, her entry concludes, leaving the reader

\(^59\) Lizzie, *Diary of a Fat Teenager*, March 4, 2009, “Inspiration Anyone?”
to question whether these events happened at all or were a fiction Mimi uses as a backdrop to explore her desire for greater confidence and a willingness to try new things.

I love inspirational writing moments. The more that I learn of myself, I learn that I should stop lowering my expectations and soar higher. I have to learn how to hurt first. (Mimi, *We’re Living La Dolce Vita*, June 26, 2010, “Scent”)

While it is impossible to know whether any zinester or blogger is telling the truth in her writing, what Mimi’s writing indicates is that her blog is a space to tell stories that, fact or fiction, are part of her inquiry process. Here, Mimi describes a desire to “soar higher” while at the same time feeling she needs to know how to hurt. Mimi’s blog is a space of negotiation between soaring and potential hurt; in creating a hybrid space between fantasy and reality, Mimi invites her reader into her ambiguous process.

Following Walkerdine (2007), Danielle’s zining practice is at once constructed by her engagement with both personal and culturally influenced fantasy, both of which play out in her zine. In her essay “Infanticide,” Danielle describes receiving an Asian baby doll from her mother:

“Do you like her?” my mother asks anxiously.
“Yes,” I lie.
“She doesn’t really look Asian, does she?” my mother frets.
“Kind of,” I say. Whether she does or not, she is ugly, an ugly Asian baby doll; overpriced; sold in a catalog to parents like my mom who worry about their children growing up different and isolated; those frightening terms I have heard used; used about me. (Danielle, *Cherry Blossom, Cherry Pie*, “Infanticide,” p. 15)

Rather than obviating feelings of difference or isolation, the doll seems to confound them.

Instead of playing with her new doll, Danielle suffocates her:

I can see her little pursed mouth sucking for air, the blanket pressing against it, the knit fabric puffing up and down a bit against the nostrils. I begin to shiver and sweat. She dies so quickly. (Danielle, *Cherry Blossom, Cherry Pie*, “Infanticide,” p. 16)
Obviously Danielle does not murder a real baby, but with this story she blurs the boundary between fantasy and reality. By drawing on her memories from childhood, she recalls the way her crime felt real, and within the story it is represented as such. The conflation of reality and fantasy works here as a function of this childish memory, but it also challenges the fantasy that the doll could cure the feeling of difference. Rather than embracing the doll that was sent as an antidote to difference and isolation, Danielle kills her. Within the hybrid space of the zine, Danielle can explore the death that occurred that night before dinnertime as a real loss, between fantasy and reality. Moreover, she and the reader both must inquire into the matter of what exactly died that night, a question that can never be fully answered or understood by author or reader and requires continued inquiry.

In Lizzie’s blog, she questions the fantasy–reality binary coupled with the online–offline binary. In this entry, she notes that she feels as though she has given in to “the Fantasy,” or the idea that thinness will make her more attractive:

It doesn’t help that lately I hadn’t been feeling too hot about myself...I feel like I started slipping back into the Fantasy, the idea that I could control my body and make it just a little bit smaller and just lose a little bit of weight (I went so far as to download a “weight-loss” application to my iTouch. Thankfully it was free and I have since deleted it). Mostly I feel like lately it’s because I don’t think I’m attractive. I hate that I think that, but I do. I mean, it’s one thing to have people online say positive comments, but it’s another thing IRL. (Lizzie, *Diary of a Fat Teenager*, March 4, 2009, “Inspiration Anyone?”)

While Lizzie blogs about the fantasy of being happier if she were thinner, this entry alludes to another fantasy of total self-confidence. She questions whether she will ever feel confident in her life offline, where she does not get supportive comments from random strangers; however, she neglects in this entry to mention the negative comments she receives in her online life from
trolls. While Lizzie wants to believe that her life online is a happier space that she controls, it shares more traits with her offline life than she tends to admit. Thus, the blog, while a crucial hybrid space, is not a panacea. Neither blogs nor zines provide the sanctuary that many bloggers seek. However, they do provide a space of questioning and inquiry where they can take steps toward engagement with readers in a third space, and through questioning, create hybrid spaces as well.

The zines and blogs in this study call into question not only the distinctions that we hold between online and offline, reality and fantasy, but also invite us to question the ways in which we use those distinctions to shape discourse. Returning to Katie’s zine, Aubade #4, about her life growing up in the state of Virginia as it changed around her, it becomes apparent that it is also about the way her view of the place has changed as she, too, has changed. The struggle to discern any truth about Virginia, or about herself, speaks to these real and imagined elements. The struggles that she describes may be the challenges that young women face as they undertake the literacy practices that create these texts and the hybrid spaces they enable. These struggles are also shared by the reader if she hopes to enter a third space with the author.

V. Third Spaces as Prepolitical

Through their writing practices, the zinesters and bloggers in this study carve out spaces for their subjectivity work, and in so doing, carve out a notion of hybrid space that challenges the public–private, online–real life, and fantasy–reality binaries. Similarly, Antigone’s act gestured toward a notion of a space between the polis and the oikos, where she could seek recognition despite her transgressive past. In Chapter Three, I argued that Antigone’s story is a prepolitical
one. This suggests that the purpose and language to articulate the tensions between community
customs and the abstract concept of a state have yet to be fully developed (Butler, 2000;
Sjoholm, 2004). As Antigone’s action calls into question the strict division between the two
spheres, she contributes to this prepolitical climate with her ingenuous insertions of her private
life in the public sphere.

Similarly, the zinesters and bloggers in this study are also forging a prepolitical space
with their writings. A prepolitical movement may be so disparate that participants do not
consciously realize they are participating in such a movement, and I argue that the writing of the
zinesters and bloggers in this study make such contributions to the discussion on young women’s
subjectivities in addition to carving out spaces for that discussion to occur. Both zinesters and
bloggers acknowledge that these practices, though crucial to themselves as particular subjects,
are also forms of public engagement. Just as this engagement is enriching for them as
individuals, it also sustains public discourse on young womanhood. The range of this discourse
suggests that it is still in process, and the ambivalence with which the young women approach
their subject matter, coupled with the vehemence of their convictions about their literacy
practices, indicate the prepolitical nature of this work.

By reading these zines and blogs within a third space of enunciation, I have endeavored
to give a reading that ascribes meaning but that allows the texts to remain ambiguous. While I
have argued that zinesters and bloggers both consciously and unconsciously make meaning
through their practices, there are meanings within these texts that are unavailable to me as a
reader. However, the practice of meeting these authors in a third space of enunciation is an
important contribution to the development of prepolitical spaces in that it provides the
recognition such movements need in order to move beyond the immediacy of their initial articulations toward self-consciousness. Through my readings of zinesters and bloggers, I have attempted to show that they articulate particular subjectivities while questioning those subjectivities and hegemonic discourses. In recognizing this work and incorporating my work in understanding these texts into my own discursive practices, I and other readers who meet these young women in third spaces are in a position to help facilitate this change.
Chapter Six

Melancholic Questioning: Challenging Dominant Narratives and Post-feminism

I. Introduction

As I argued in Chapter Three, Antigone attempts to grieve her brother while she mourns other ungrievable, unspoken losses. Implicit in this act is whether and how Antigone can mourn at all in a society that will not acknowledge her loss and forbids the burial not only of this particular brother, but also the mourning of any of her losses resultant from the incestuous relationship of her parents. Butler (2000) notes that Antigone’s story highlights the difficulty of the ungrievable loss and indicates that her own death is a denial of these laws as sovereign: “Antigone refuses to obey any law that refuses public recognition of her loss, and in this way prefigures the situation that those with publicly ungrievable losses—from AIDS, for instance—know too well” (p. 24). These losses are ungrievable due to the social foreclosure of the possibility of homosexual love; the impact this foreclosure has on individuals whose loves are socially unacceptable is also present in the writing of zinesters and bloggers.

In this chapter, I explore the role such foreclosures play within the work of zinesters and bloggers. I will also explore the relationship of ambivalence and melancholia and argue that zinesters and bloggers articulate a sense of ambivalence through the questioning they undertake within their zines and blogs. In the first section of the chapter, I will use Freud’s (1960, 1963) accounts of melancholia and Butler’s (1997, 2000) reading of those accounts to build this case. I then argue that the zinesters and bloggers in this study question hegemonic discourses of gender and the family within their writing practices; similarly, Antigone’s public action problematizes
the relationship of kinship and the state. By using blogs and zines as a space of inquiry, the young women in my study are able to move through the melancholic process and retain or examine important aspects of their lives that differ from socially articulated norms. In the second half of the chapter, I will explore the ways in which Antigone’s story invites a consideration of writings of youth as responses to or inquires about post-feminist discourse (McRobbie, 2004a, 2004b). I argue that reading zines and blogs provides an opportunity to reconsider feminism through engaging with the questions that their writing undertakes.

II. Melancholic Interventions

Melancholic Questioning

In Chapter Three, I argued that the practice of mourning is at the heart of Antigone’s story, but that her disposition is more aptly described as melancholic due to the unrecognized nature of her losses. Butler (2000) notes that Antigone’s melancholia results from her refusal to grieve. She will not give up the object of her mourning; instead, she very publicly insists on her right to mourn publicly. The fact that she must grieve so publicly suggests that what she must grieve is ungrievable, or that she is not willing to let go of what was lost. As Butler notes, “Her claim to entitlement may well be the sign of a melancholia at work in her speech” (Butler, 2000, p. 80). Beyond the particular loss of Polyneices, Antigone grieves the loss of her family, shattered by the revelation of her parents’ incest. This loss is amplified by the fact that as the play begins, she is slated to marry Haemon, Creon’s son, which will move her still further from her birth family. Her losses are ungrievable in two ways. First, as Freud notes in “Mourning and Melancholia” (1963), one can know what in particular she has lost, but not the ideal contained in
that loss. An ideal can also be lost without a sense of what in particular this loss entails. In Antigone’s case, one could argue that she knows she has lost her particular brother, but not what she has lost in him. However, her loss is complicated by incest: Her brother is her uncle and her father is her brother, so when she says that she grieves for her brother, Butler wonders if we can be sure to whom she refers, or if she is sure herself.

In his later account of melancholia in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud (1960) revises his earlier account of melancholia to assert that melancholia is a necessary step within the process of healthy mourning. Melancholia is the process through which one internalizes the lost object before one can let it go. What occurs instead is the “incorporation of the attachment as identification,” which is a redefinition of Freud’s concept of letting go of an object (Butler, 1997, p. 134). In his first account, the object is relinquished so that the mourner can get on with life, but in this later account, the object is never completely lost; it is preserved within the psyche. This identification forms the ego, and the lost object is equated with the ego itself. Butler (1997) refers to this process as “melancholic incorporation” because the object is lost in the external world but preserved in the ego.

Beyond her confusion over whom she has lost, her losses are also ungrievable because of the social prohibitions against incest. When an attachment is socially prohibited, such as Antigone’s love for her parents and her brother, melancholic incorporation happens in a similar fashion. The forbidden attachment is internalized; however, a side effect of this internalization is a view of the external world as being shaped by these foreclosures (Butler, 1997). In her work on Antigone, Butler is interested in the “convergence of social prohibition and melancholia” (Butler, 2000, p. 80). Because the superego has a social side, in that it is shaped by social prohibitions in
order to instantiate what the ego should be, the relationship of the psychic and the social can be seen in melancholic attachment. One example of this is ways in which the regulative social norms are performed through our attempts to overcome them. Antigone’s claim to mourn her family is one such articulation of these regulative norms; in her insistence that she should be able to mourn, she underscores the prohibition against it. Antigone’s unwillingness to internalize the loss of her particular brother—and ultimately her suicide—may be attributable to the fact that she was already melancholic, due to her relationship to the prohibition against incest.

In retaining the lost object, a trace of the object is left in the psyche; in mourning, the links that these traces have to the object itself are slowly overcome, but in melancholia, a connection remains. This sustained connection has to do with the ambivalence inherent in the melancholic attachment. I follow Butler (1997) in reading Freud here to mean that this ambivalence is the result of the threat of losing a loved object, which is implicit in loving it. This ambivalence is internal and unconscious and is only expressed in melancholia. Therefore, ambivalence is a necessary step for the development of the ego/superego dynamic, as it is a result of the ego’s first encounters, so to speak, with criticality. This notion not only posits melancholia as a part of mourning but also indicates that the movement through melancholia is necessary for the formation of a healthy psyche.

The socially contingent elements of this movement through melancholia are of particular interest to Butler. She described a sort of “original melancholia” that emerges when we learn that we must give up our love of our same-sex parent, since in identifying with one gender, we learn that we must love the other. She argued that we may know who we have lost, but not what ideologically what we have been asked to give up as a result. This loss thus instantiates
heterosexuality. Similarly, for Antigone, as she moves toward her marriage, she must give up her family, yet because of its incestuous beginnings, she has already lost them.

Melancholia is also a process of representation, in that part of retaining the object is an attempt to represent the landscape of psychic life that includes the lost object. As Butler notes, “Melancholia provides the condition of possibility for the articulation of psychic topographies, of the ego itself” (Butler, 1997, p. 177). While Kristeva’s (1989) account of melancholia differs from Butler’s, the two share Freudian roots. Kristeva notes that while the imagination feeds on loss and sadness, a true work of art can only be produced after the loss has been overcome. While it is beyond the scope of this project to consider the aesthetic dimensions of zines and blogs and under what accounts of art and the aesthetic they might qualify as works of art, it bears mentioning that within her account of melancholia, creativity is not a cure for melancholia; melancholia is in fact an impediment to the art making process. It is crucial, in her account, for the melancholic to take advantage of the insight that her condition provides without losing oneself in sadness (Ruti, 2005). I agree with Kristeva to the extent that I do not posit zining and blogging as ways to overcome their melancholia. Rather I suggest that the questioning and inquiry that takes place within these spaces is important to their working through of melancholic attachments or dispositions. Therefore, exploring writings that make attempts to articulate losses, whether of objects or ideals, is useful in shaping a discussion of subjectivities.

In what follows, I will explore the movements through melancholia that the young women in this study take, by questioning their zines and blogs. Like Antigone, some zinesters

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60 In Gender Trouble (1990), Butler asserted that Kristeva’s political writings are futile. Although their views are divergent on melancholia as well, Kristeva’s perspective is also important because she addresses the melancholic practices of artists, including writers, directly.
and bloggers in this study publicly articulate certain losses, and their writings reveal processes through which they attempt to move forward from these losses. Some of their writing shows evidence of melancholic incorporation; some entries highlight the relationship of the writings with socially foreclosed loves. In other cases, their melancholic process has to do with acknowledging the ways in which their stories do not match up with hegemonic discourses, and they express ambivalence about such discourses and themselves. However, in all cases, they use their writing practices as spaces of questioning toward a hopeful future that can incorporate their pasts. I refer to this practice as melancholic questioning because the zinesters and bloggers do not merely incorporate lost objects; through their questioning, they attempt to keep their pasts within their consciousness, and in some cases bring forth previously unspoken losses.

I first look at zines and blogs as challenges to dominant discourses of family and gender and explore the ways in which the relationship between the social and kinship can be used to problematize them. Then I explore some articulations of unspoken losses within their writings that emerge through discussions of particular losses. In both cases, I will explore the roles that foreclosures of love and ambivalence play in the melancholic questioning processes undertaken by the zinesters and bloggers that serve to move them forward in their processes of understanding themselves within a social context.

From Childhood to Adulthood

In Chapter Three, I discussed the ways in which Anne Frank’s story is often universalized as the story of any teenage girl as opposed to a story of Anne as a Jewish girl in confinement, or even a particular girl at all. Such readings deny Anne a particular subjectivity;
however, it is still crucial to consider the ways in which her story shapes various discourses of adolescence, girlhood, Jewishness, and responses to anti-Semitism. The stories from the zines and blogs I examine below also explore this space between the particular and the universal, and the importance of being recognized as a particular subject within a mediated public makes important contributions to larger public discourses. Antigone’s story asks similar questions about the role that particularity plays in the ways in which we can engage in the public sphere and be recognized there as both particular individuals and contributors to a larger cultural conversation.

The issues of gender and family intertwine in Antigone’s story; her kinship connections are what drive her to the public sphere, where she defies gendered norms and speaks out on her family’s behalf. The zinesters and bloggers in this study also speak about family and gender issues within their writings as they discuss concerns about and setbacks to their processes of moving from childhood to adulthood. However, unlike Antigone, they use zines and blogs as hybrid spaces between public and private, fantasy and reality, past and future, in order to conduct melancholic questioning that leads to a hopeful future. In what follows, I will use two bloggers’ and one zinester’s writings to demonstrate the ways in which discussions of family and gender issues tease out melancholic positions in the writings of the young women in my study. I will argue that like Antigone, these young women are negotiating the ways in which their lived realities pose challenges to gendered norms and norms of family life.
"We’re going to have to have some other kind of great moment": Family ties. As a daughter of Oedipus, Antigone was born into tragedy. It is difficult for her to assume the role of daughter when her family’s roles were always already so complicated by the fact of incestuous parentage. However, Antigone’s story is also evidence that kinship is contingent upon the social, since the incest taboo is socially instituted (Butler, 2000). Danielle’s zine Cherry Blossom, Cherry Pie #2 highlights some of the ways in which contemporary notions of a healthy and happy family life are also socially constructed, through her acknowledgment that her own life does not replicate hegemonic tropes of family.

In her zine, Danielle, a Chinese Japanese American woman in her twenties, reflects on themes of loss, gender, and ethnic identity. In an essay entitled “Quality Crab,” she describes the contingencies of both subject positions and kinship connections with the social. Danielle recalls seeing Joy Luck Club with her Chinese American mother and being irritated by the contrived Chinese accents of the Asian American actors while at the same time feeling jealous of the precious moments shared by the mothers and daughters portrayed in the film. She writes, “This Asian-American life, ours—isn’t much like The Joy Luck Club at all, even if we are also Chinese American. I guess we’re going to have to have some other kind of great moment instead” (Danielle, Cherry Blossom, Cherry Pie #2, p. 4). On one level, Danielle is responding to the media imagery of Chinese Americans promoted by The Joy Luck Club. As McRobbie notes (1991), she has come to this text (the film) with prior knowledge—in this case, of stereotypes of Chinese Americans—but rather than using the text as an opportunity to internalize these codes further or create a counternarrative, she understands the film’s appeal despite her criticisms.

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61 Danielle (2006), Cherry Blossom, Cherry Pie, #2, p. 4.
Her tone of chagrin and sarcasm demonstrates ambivalence toward the film and the ways in which it impacts her as a particular Chinese American woman. As particular women, she and her mother are distinct from the tropes the movie portrays. At the same time, it is hard to be particular women because of and in spite of the appeal of the hegemonic image of happy Chinese American mothers and daughters. As much as she would like to have a touching moment with her mother, she recognizes the impossibility of such a moment. In the film these moments tend to come when, as Danielle puts it, a “Chinese-wise” aphorism is shared between women and they can enjoy its age-old wisdom instead of rethinking Chinese American womanhood. Danielle uses her writing as an occasion to reflect on the memories she does have of their relationship, which are filled with both sadness and hope.

Elsewhere in the zine, Danielle describes the challenging years after her parents’ divorce, which do not align with the cinematic images of perfect Asian American families. These are the stories that, for her, signify that her life is not a prototypical narrative as suggested by *The Joy Luck Club*. For example, an essay entitled “A Car, A Bicycle, A Banana” is occasioned by a memory Danielle has while sitting in the driver’s seat of a brand new car her mother has purchased for her. She recalls a trip to school on her mother’s bicycle years ago, after her mother’s boyfriend leaves with their car. Thinking it will be an adventure, Danielle describes their ride:

It is the landscape of my childhood with my mother. I am safe. She can do anything. Closer to town, a truck passes us, too close. Caught in the draft, we wobble dangerously, and the narrow bicycle tires catch in a groove, and now we’re going down. I fall to the pavement, and now my knees are scraped and throbbing, dotted with tiny asphalt pebbles and oozing blood… My mother curses, licks at her fingers and wipes at my knees. “You’re okay,” she tells me. “Okay?” “Okay,” I say. She picks up the bike and we’re back in motion. (Danielle, *Cherry Blossom, Cherry Pie* #2, p. 18)
Although this vignette may not be a perfect mother-daughter moment from a film, by telling this story, Danielle articulates an alternative narrative to the hegemonic *Joy Luck Club* story. Through telling her particular story, she is mourning the loss of a norm of Chinese American life that may not exist anywhere but in such films. Like Antigone, her experiences challenge the existence of these very norms. However, through her writing practice, Danielle problematizes the social norms that attempt to foreclose her family story and uses the zine as an opportunity for melancholic incorporation of her own past, indicating to her reader that she may already have had great moments with her mother.

Lizzie, blogger of *Diary of a Fat Teenager*, also writes about family tensions. As Lizzie’s blog evolves, she writes about whether she should vote for Barack Obama in the upcoming 2008 presidential election. Her family is opposed to his candidacy, but she prefers him to his opponents. After Obama is elected president, she has a falling out with her father, who feels alienated by his daughter’s choice. He writes her two poems expressing these feelings, noting that he does not think their relationship can survive this breach.

Lizzie’s response indicates that her choice to vote against the rule of her father spurs a chain of events that illuminates more clearly the tensions existing within her family and their complicated relationship with the state. She writes of her father,

But when he tells me all this bullshit about why it’s driving us apart—it just makes me pissed. It sounds so..[sic] I dunno, like he’s talking down to me. Like I’m getting scolded. … I take politics seriously, I care who runs our country. I care about the rights of people who aren’t me. But I don’t take it so seriously that I would hate my family if they don’t agree with me. (Lizzie, *Diary of a Fat Teenager*, November 9, 2009, “Interpretation Please?”)
Lizzie’s father attempts to force her into a counternarrative position. As Nussbaum (1986) notes, Antigone and Creon initially occupy equally adamant and opposing positions. However, as the play evolves, Antigone begins to take on a slightly more questioning stance. Rather than taking an opposing position to her father’s, Lizzie recognizes that their differing positions do not have to be binaries, and that it is possible for each of them to have a more nuanced view than radical left and radical right. Her questioning of the relationship between family and politics is similar to the tension that Antigone’s act underscores, of the contingency of kinship and the social. However, Lizzie uses the space of her blog as a space of inquiry on this issue. Rather than internalizing her love for her family or her politics, Lizzie questions the binary opposition between the two.

While Lizzie is clearly moving away from her family’s beliefs, she does not want to let go of her love for them. According to her family, she should give up her progressive politics and maintain a connection with them. This underscores the contingent nature of melancholia: If Lizzie is melancholic, it is because of a sanction imposed by her family for her politics. As expressed in the literature on emergent adulthood (Arnett, 2000), young people perceive independence and autonomy as important signifiers of adulthood, and during this phase of life they are not independent. The appearance of an either–or choice between the mindset of independent adulthood versus that of childhood tetheredness to one’s family of origin creates this false choice. By articulating her ambivalence about losing her father’s love, Lizzie is able to use her blog as a space of melancholic questioning to untangle this binary.
“It’s just another fantasy”: Problematizing gender. In the blog entry quoted above, Lizzie becomes increasingly angry; meanwhile her father’s letter to her is morose and ends with two poems that he claims were written because men should not cry, so they write bad poetry instead. This parallels Butler’s (2000) assertion that Creon and Antigone begin to take on each others’ gendered roles through their encounter; she becomes more manly and he, less so. In a similar manner, both family roles and gender roles are destabilized through Lizzie and her father’s writing practices. Although much of Lizzie’s blog is overtly dedicated to destabilizing gendered norms, when she writes about a night of particularly low self-esteem after watching the film *The House Bunny* with her family, it is clear that she has internalized these norms and struggles to articulate her ambivalence about female beauty. The film’s celebration of typical images of female beauty distresses Lizzie, who feels that she will never be such an object of desire because she is fat. Like Danielle’s use of *Joy Luck Club*, Lizzie uses this film to problematize and question her relationship to issues of gender rather than as an occasion to further internalize them, as the Ophelia discourse, which noted that young women are victims of media culture and stand to lose their senses of self, suggests she might.

But right now all I can think in my head is “I’ll never be that girl.” No matter what I do I’ll never be the girl that every guy wants to fuck, that people would say how sexy I look in that skimpy outfit—it will never ever happen. I don’t know why it is so hard for me to accept it. Probably because our culture deems that as what is normal and what should be. Maybe it’s just another fantasy for me, one that is hard to let go. (Lizzie, *Diary of a Fat Teenager*, July 22, 2009, “I Will Never Be That Girl”)

Lizzie knows that her feelings of self-esteem have been foreclosed in part by the imperative of thinness in western ideals of female beauty. As discussed in Chapter Five, Lizzie

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began her blog to write about being a “happy fat girl,” which can be read as her ego ideal, or who she would like to be. Her notion of “the fantasy” of thinness, however, complicates this ideal self. The ego ideal has a social side, as Freud noted, since social prohibitions in part instantiate what the ego should be. Thus, as Lizzie struggles on her blog to be the happy fat girl, she is struggling with the implications of the social foreclosure of fatness as part of femininity. Lizzie also recognizes that cultural and social messages influence both the beauty norm and her own feelings of self-doubt. Although she believes she is beautiful, the impact of such messages on her self-esteem can be difficult to deflect:

   And the thing is—that isn’t the girl I want to be. I want to be beautiful just the way I am. But it’s just so goddamn hard with all these bullshit messages all around me. I hate them, I really, really, hate them. I wish I could be more eloquent with my words, but I just don’t know how to articulate what I want to say. (Lizzie, Diary of a Fat Teenager, July 22, 2009, “I Will Never Be That Girl”)

While Lizzie wants to be accepted as beautiful the way she is, she is not considering the ways in which her desire to be beautiful is already a performance of a feminine ideal (Butler, 1997). As much as Lizzie is frustrated by images of thin beautiful women, she has already internalized them as an ideal of femininity. Therefore, part of her melancholic work through her blog must involve problematizing what is already internal to her ego ideal. In order to let go of this socially constructed ideal that she has internalized, a space of negotiation is necessary, and for Lizzie, her blog plays this role.

Stephanie, an engineering student and blogger of Wooty Woot, also blogs about gender. Although she notes that most female engineering students are “tomboys” and she falls into this category at times, she has started to take an interest in her appearance. After buying some dresses, skirts, and closer-fitting tops, she writes, “What I didn’t expect was to enjoy it. I like
being girlier. I think that I can be one of those epic engineers, and a good-looking woman. Nothing wrong with that as long as I can still do my job, right?” (Wooty Woot, November 9, 2010, “Unleashing My Inner Girl”). Stephanie’s experimentation with a more feminine appearance denotes that like Lizzie, she has internalized notions of femininity and is experimenting with performing gender. Her public insistence on her right to be feminine indicates some melancholia in her speech; just as Antigone insists on her right to bury her brother, Stephanie’s insistence on her ability to be feminine and bright underscores the notion that these two traits are often seen as incompatible. Lizzie might say that Stephanie’s desire for a more typically feminine appearance is her way of giving in to “the fantasy” that such an appearance will make her feel happier and more self-assured. Unlike Lizzie, Stephanie is not problematizing beauty standards; however, she is responding to stereotypes of female engineers, which she may find more difficult to contend with in her everyday life. As McRobbie (1990) notes, her engagement with hegemonic discourse is not necessarily a blind acceptance. Rather, Stephanie’s experimentation with feminine identities and subsequent discussion on her blog are inquiries into the role that feminine beauty ideals play in her life, and her feelings about them in general.

Amber, zinester of Culture Slut #19, writes about experiences that led her to identify as queer. In one essay, “The Girl with the Yellow Sweater,” she writes about her first experience kissing a girl at a party, noting that at the time girls kissing each other seemed in vogue at parties among her friends and that girls would kiss to fulfill male fantasies. She notes her frustration and confusion at these parties:
I thought that they were really screwing things up for me, and for other girls who were confused about their sexuality by turning it into one big spectacle for the boys. I was embarrassed for them, but a little jealous, too. I wanted to kiss girls, but I didn’t want the boys to watch me do it. What’s a girl to do? I’ve learned to become a little less judgmental. I’ve realized that those girls might’ve been in the same situation as me. Maybe they couldn’t find another way, either. (Amber, *Culture Slut* #19, p. 16).

Here, Amber details her process of coming to accept the fact that she and these girls may have been in the same situation, feeling that the only way to express their homosexual desire was to contextualize it in a manner that appealed to male desire. Amber describes a performance of gender that begs the question of whether all gender identification is a melancholic process. As Butler (1997) notes, melancholia is at its core a way of internalizing attachments that are gone from the external world. As such, it can also be viewed as creating the conditions under which we come to realize that the world is organized around such foreclosures. Our gender identification, she notes, is premised on a loss that cannot be grieved because it is posited as normal. The loss of the mother as an object of desire for girls is preemptive against homosexuality. She argues that homosexual desire thus “panics” gender, because part of being a girl is not wanting another girl (Butler, 1997, p. 135).

She also uses this argument to discuss the notion of gay melancholia, the result of the foreclosure of homosexual love. In Amber’s writing, she describes the young women as using male desire as a condition that sanctions their kissing; however, what Amber questions is the original desire: Did the girls want to kiss each other, therefore drawing on their knowledge that the boys would enjoy it, or did they want to incite the boys’ desire and therefore decide to kiss? Although Amber indicates that she has no way of knowing and ultimately decides to be less judgmental, the ambivalence that she expresses toward these other girls seems like important
work in the service of working through her own melancholia resulting from the foreclosure of homosexuality.

The inquiries that Danielle, Lizzie, and Stephanie make through their writing practices suggests that rather than letting go of objects, each lets go of an ideal. As Freud notes, when an ideal is lost, the melancholic struggles to maintain a trace of this ideal; part of the work of melancholia is articulating this trace. The work that these young women undertake is the process of articulating these traces. In their accounts of gender, Danielle and Lizzie articulate the ideal lives that they will never have in their critiques of these films, but also question whether they are worth having. Amber addresses the foreclosure of homosexual desire and problematizes the use of it to incite heterosexual male desire, while at the same time acknowledging that for her this was a short circuiting of that foreclosure.

The writings on family perform a similar function and also speak to the contingency of kinship upon the social. In order for a family to be recognized as such, it must fulfill social and cultural norms in keeping with hegemonic definitions. Like Danielle and Lizzie, Antigone’s family begs the question of whether and how they are families at all, and how their members identify in relation to one another in light of the many roles they play within society and the family itself. The actions, in deed and in writing, subvert these definitions; they have both overt and subtle impacts on the particularity of their authors and problematize the hegemonic ideals and binaries to which they respond. In the next section, I explore these subversions as responses to unspeakable losses that the young women are struggling to voice.
“I’m just melancholy about the whole situation”\textsuperscript{63}: Unspoken losses. Above, I discussed losses of ideals rather than objects per se. The losses that I will describe below are difficult to articulate because the zinesters and bloggers are aware of particular losses, but they struggle through their zining and blogging to discover what these losses represent (Freud, 1960). This struggle was often coded as \textit{aporia}, \textit{ambivalence}, \textit{ungrievable loss}, or \textit{melancholia}. Their ambivalence about the nature of losses is a central characteristic of Freud’s account of melancholia as a part of the mourning process and his account of the formation of the ego and superego. The articulation of melancholic ambivalence is given as a crucial factor to the development of the ego and the superego.

Lizzie provides an example of ungrievable loss in her ongoing battle with trolls who aggressively critique her stance on fat acceptance on her blog. As she monitors her comments, Lizzie often turns particularly offensive comments from trolls into new blog posts. Although in her comment rules section she claims her prerogative to delete troll comments, she cannot seem to help herself from responding to the trolls on a very frequent basis. She writes of her retorts, “And I know I’ve been asked why I post these, since it’s just giving them attention and all, but sometimes I feel the need to point out the bullshit spewing from ignorant people. I don’t post every comment, just the ones that are really stupid/ignorant/whatever” (\textit{Diary of a Fat Teenager}, November 12, 2008, “Lolz My Ignorant Comments”). Rather than solely exposing their stupidity, Lizzie’s constant attention to and discussion of the trolls is very similar to Antigone’s need to insist on her right to grieve. This is where Lizzie’s speech becomes melancholic; the fact

\textsuperscript{63} Sabrina (2008), \textit{Four Horsemen} #3, p. 12.
that she must insist on her right to refute the trolls underscores the prohibitions against fatness that they represent.

And no matter what I say to them, they don’t get it, they just keep on being jerks. But if I leave them alone they’ll think they’ve “won” or whatever. Ugh. Why can’t they just not go there is the first place? Why do they feel the need to go out of their own fucking way to be like that? (Diary of a Fat Teenager, June 4, 2008, “Suicide Is Always A Good Option”)

Lizzie’s admission that she needs to engage with the trolls so they don’t “win” is an indication that part of her discourse with them is her understanding that her blog is a space where the social prohibitions against fatness still exist, despite her attempts to censor them. Her public declarations against the trolls indicate in part the impossibility of her project in a society that prohibits fatness. However, her persistent inquiry within the space of her blog demonstrates that unlike Antigone, she will not remain melancholic about the trolls. Rather than taking a melancholic stance in her life offline, Lizzie uses the hybrid space of the blog to articulate her ambivalence about her fatness. As we saw above, despite her desire to be the “happy fat girl,” Lizzie feels this identity being foreclosed by the social prohibitions on fatness. Within the space of her blog, she can articulate her ambivalence about this identity and acknowledge the impact of this foreclosure upon her as a particular fat woman. While Lizzie does not overtly acknowledge that the loss of the trolls would be a loss of an opportunity to explore this ambivalence, her constant engagement with them suggests that is an inquiry into her own feeling about fat acceptance that she cannot undertake in spaces outside her blog.

In her zine, Four Horsemen #3 Sabrina, who had a baby as an 18-year-old, describes the losses that result from having a child during her emergent adulthood. As Arnett (2000) noted, although emergent adults vary greatly in their pursuits during this period of life, it is generally a
time of self-discovery that can be difficult for young people who are parenting. Writing in her zine, Sabrina describes situations in which she articulates frustration, anger, or sadness that is associated with the difficulties of parenting as a young person, yet she does not speak of the loss of the freedom that many of her peers enjoy. For example, Sabrina describes an incident in which her son pulls a dish of plants onto the floor and manages to spread dirt across the carpet before she discovers him. Sabrina, who was doing her homework at the time, is at first furious, then deeply upset. “My initial anger quickly turned into sadness and disgust with myself, and I stood there crying, ‘I’m a terrible mother!’ It was an awful scene. I stood there crying hysterically while Zachary gleefully dug in the dirt” (p. 10). Sabrina’s sense of loss in this situation also speaks to deeper losses than the loss of the plants or the time it will take to clean up the mess. Rather, as a young mother who is at once raising a child and in school herself, she has lost her youth.

In another essay, “Memorabilia,” she describes her sadness over the loss of her best friend from high school, with whom she no longer speaks. She describes the fun they used to have together and notes,

It makes me a little sad that I don’t have anything tangible to remember all the good (and bad and frustrating) times we had. No pictures, no notes, no journal entries…He only lives right around the block, but I don’t go to see him. I just feel melancholy about the whole situation. It can be really hard when things change. It’s fun and fulfilling to

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64 Although I quote Arnett here, I also must acknowledge that his theory seems to ignore a large number of parenting teens and young adults in this country. According to Planned Parenthood, in the 2000s, about 31% of young women become pregnant before the age of twenty. (Suellentrop, Katherine & Christine Flanigan (2006, April, accessed 2007, August 3), “Science Says: Pregnancy Among Sexually Experienced Teens” (2002), http://www.teenpregnancy.org/works/pdf/Science_Says_23.pdf). Of these pregnancies, 56% resulted in a birth (Ventura, Stephanie J., et al. (2006, December 13), "Recent Trends in Teenage Pregnancy in the United States, 1990-2002," Health E-stats, Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.). The pregnancy rate is also much higher for Black and Hispanic teens than it is for White teens. These statistics indicate that emergent adulthood is a stage of life that takes the experiences of White young people into account in particular. From http://www.plannedparenthoodnj.org/library/topic/family_planning/teen_pregnancy accessed 4/22/11.
remember the good times, but I think it’s just not worth it to dwell on the past. (Sabrina, 
*Four Horsemen*, p. 12)

Although Sabrina’s writing indicates a true sense of loss over this friend, her entry points to the 
loss of her youth, a loss that is present in subtext within her writing. She remembers not only the 
friendship with this person, but the life that she had before she was a parent. Sabrina’s writing 
highlights that in melancholia, we may know whom we have lost, but not what we have lost in 
them. In this case, she has lost the freedom of her youth. Her simple statement that it is hard 
when things change articulates quite succinctly the melancholic space that the zinesters and 
bloggers in my study move through as they make the inevitable movement from childhood to 
adulthood, and while she expresses the inevitability of the future, she also expresses a desire to 
hold onto the past. Although Sabrina writes that she would rather “not dwell on the past” it is 
present in much of her zining. Her writing practice is an inquiry into her past that helps her to 
incorporate loss and articulate the ambivalence she feels about growing up toward a healthy 
future.

“*It Can Be Really Hard When Things Change*”65: Questioning the Melancholic Position

In this section, I have argued that the zinesters and bloggers in my study problematize 
gendered norms and normative narratives of family life. They use the stories of their own lives to 
challenge these norms and destabilize binaries, including the narrative counternarrative binary. 
Throughout the examples I have described here, young women use their blogging and zining 
practices as spaces of questioning and intervention. However, rather than taking up a

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65 Sabrina, *Four Horsemen*, p. 12.
melancholic position in which the inability to disconnect from the past hinders their movement toward the future, as it did for Antigone, these young women use their writing to move through the melancholic position toward the future.

Melancholic engagement for these young women is inquiry that takes place within their zining and blogging practices. This work is not only personal; it also speaks to “a melancholy of the public sphere” (Butler, 2000, p. 80), which refers to a melancholia that occurs when recognition is denied due to social foreclosures. By telling their particular stories within their zines and blogs, they contribute to a larger conversation that questions this larger melancholia. Their zines and blogs provide a hybrid space, between public and private, where they engage with an audience through discussion that broaches these questions and, as I argued in Chapter Five invites the reader to engage with their texts as well as these issues.

III. “The Specter of Feminism”66: Antigone’s Death and Post-feminism

At the end of Antigone, the heroine dies. Her tragic end makes it difficult to consider her story as a feminist triumph, but it does not lessen her story as one of feminist inquiry. I read Antigone’s death as symbolic of her refusal of misrecognition. Cast in a counternarrative position by her uncle, between public and private, misread as an adult, and always already melancholic about her family’s place in ancient Greek life, Antigone cannot persist in Thebes. I offer McRobbie’s (2004a, 2004b) reading of Antigone’s death, influenced by Butler’s (1997, 2000) account, as gesturing toward the specter of feminism that we are left with in the so-called post-feminist era. “Post-feminist” is a term used to describe cultures that have supposedly

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addressed the political and social ramifications of sexism to the point that feminism as it was understood in the 20th century is no longer necessary (McRobbie, 2004a, 2004b; Malson et al., 2011). Butler’s reading of Antigone provides an opportunity to think about the ways in which her death points to the regulations that exist to maintain the binaries between kinship and the social, public and private that serve to vilify feminism. McRobbie refers to this phenomenon as the “regulative dynamic” that curtails feminism, which is pervasive particularly in the field of popular culture. This is not unlike Butler’s (1997) reference to the Foucauldian notion of regulatory ideals that curtail socially unacceptable acts. She uses the example of the foreclosure of the ability of gay individuals to mourn partners lost to AIDS because according to the heterosexist norms of American culture these loves never should have existed in the first place. I argue that this sort of foreclosure also occurs when young women take an interest in feminism, due to the post-feminism inherent in hegemonic discourses of young womanhood. However, the inquiries they make within their zines and blogs is important feminist work, in that it challenges hegemonic discourses through its publicity and its personal content.

Among the zinesters and bloggers in this study are very few feminists; only one zinester and one blogger identified as feminist. Within their writing, some push against the delimitations of dominant discourses deliberately, some question their own beliefs, and one decries feminism altogether. Yet by contributing their writings within the hybrid spaces of zines and blogs, all of them participate in feminist inquiry.

As O’Brien (1999) notes, contemporary young women often view feminism not as something they define but as a practice, something they do, like their zining and blogging practices. As I argued in Chapter Five, their acts in language are not only reflections on their
lives, but also constitute actions in themselves. Like O’Brien, I regard feminism as a practice of questioning and therefore something that I attempt to do in this work. I do not claim to build coalitions with the zinesters and bloggers in my study; as McRobbie suggests, this would be disingenuous (see also Aapola et al., 2005). However, to prevent feminism from becoming ensconced in the academy or any space of privilege, it is critical to engage with multiple articulations of feminism through a variety of texts. In what follows, I argue that texts written by young women are crucial resources for understanding the ways in which young people do, or relate to, feminism, that may inform its future.

*Antigone and Feminism: Two Corpses, One Tomb?*

Post-feminism suggests that women can choose to embrace traditional notions of the feminine because the feminist project has been “taken into account” (McRobbie, 2004a, p. 510) or has become a matter of common sense to the point that it is always a consideration or a given. Within popular culture this phenomenon is referred to as “the backlash,” after the eponymous book published in the 1990s (Faludi, 1992). Social science research on post-feminism has shown that although young women do articulate feminist thought, if not the language of feminism (Aapola et al., 2005, Malson et al., 2011), a disturbing trend of vilifying feminism is still palpable within the popular cultural texts that appeal to young women (McRobbie, 2004b).

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67 McRobbie (2004b) described the movement toward post-feminism as somewhat ironically brought about by a sense of feminist “success” within the academy itself. Scholarship such as hers, Butler’s (1990, 2000), Brundson’s (1997) and Harris’s (2001, 2004) on the accomplishments of women who problematized the notion of their objectification through interrogations of notions of subjectivity contributed to the sense that the work of feminism was done and therefore feminism was no longer necessary.
To make this point, McRobbie (2004a) uses the example of *Bridget Jones’ Diary*; she argued that the newspaper columns and subsequent book, as well as the film, present a contemporary narrative in which the specter of feminism is depicted as problematic. Bridget longs to be married, despite her acknowledgement that she *should* be more interested in her career or politics or anything of substance. Instead, she is obsessed with counting calories, cigarettes, and fantasizing about marriage to a successful man. The assumption here is that the opportunities that feminism provided for women did not make them happy, and therefore it should be abolished altogether. The result is what McRobbie terms a “double entanglement” of feminism: Bridget is unhappy because of feminism’s failings, but does not have feminism to rely upon as a source of potential change.

McRobbie (2004a, 2004b) sees Butler’s (1997, 2000) reading of Antigone as posing the question of whether and how feminism can be restored from this spectral state.\(^{68}\) She also views these articulations of post-feminism within popular culture as indicative of broader social and policy trends. For example, she notes that the proliferation of gay marriage gained media attention at the same moment that the Bush and Blair administrations were reinvigorating the notion of “family values.” McRobbie argues that in both cases, marriage of any kind is posited as an unquestionable good for society, rather than problematizing the notion that married couples constitute the core of society or questioning marriage as an institution. As in the case of Antigone, this example speaks to the ways in which kinship and the social are always already

\(^{68}\) McRobbie argued for a feminist politics that at its core questions the necessary relationship between kinship and the state, as does Butler in *Antigone’s Claim*. Both found it problematic when our family structures and choices about who we love serve as the basis for establishing our political rights, and questioned the ways in which our personal lives impact the extent to which we are allowed to participate in and benefit from the public and political realms.
enmeshed. Further, McRobbie notes, what is lost is a sense of criticality of social norms; focusing on who is allowed to be married creates a point-counterpoint stance toward the issue, rather than any critique of marriage itself. As Harris (2001) suggests, in opposing two views rather than taking a nuanced look at an issue, criticality is abandoned.

McRobbie (2004a, 2004b) likens the loss of feminism to the ungrievable losses that Butler (2000) addresses in her reading of Antigone. As a woman attempting to speak publicly for her own ungrievable losses within a culture that provides her no ground upon which to speak, Antigone’s death is akin to the loss of feminism. McRobbie cited Butler’s reading of Antigone’s death as an occasion to consider the stakes of post-feminism: “Feminism has served its purpose by making some various opportunities available, and for this some thanks are due, but now it can be dispensed with, its time is over. Butler’s Antigone allows us to reflect on this shadow existence. For feminism to be taken into account, it has to be understood as having passed away” (McRobbie, 2004a, p. 515). I build upon McRobbie’s claim to suggest that dominant discourses of young womanhood encourage young women either to misrecognize feminism as present within these dominant discourses or to vilify feminism altogether.

I wish to focus briefly on the ways in which young women are encouraged to eschew feminism by dominant discourses of femininity such as Ophelia, Girl Power, and the “Midriff,” a discourse that I will describe below. Despite this discouragement, young women do ambivalently engage with feminist questions in their zines and blogs. Thus, in considering Antigone’s story in its relationship to melancholia and ambivalence, we also have occasion to consider whether and how young women engage with feminism in a culture where it is an unacceptable love and is entombed.
Post-feminism and Hegemonic Discourses

Post-feminism is visible within both popular culture and popular and hegemonic discourses on young women. Returning to Bridget Jones, in McRobbie’s analysis, the specter of feminism keeps Bridget from happiness; because she has taken feminism into account, she cannot be happy. Bridget could be said to have a melancholic attachment to a world without feminism; she longs for a time when feminism did not have to be part of a woman’s consciousness. Similarly, McRobbie reads Butler as saying that Antigone’s death represents the spectral state that feminism now occupies; it has been cast out of public discussion and political affairs so that social life can be intelligible. However, in its spectral state it must be further repudiated, as she noted: “That which is lost retains a proximity, and that closeness is a site also of fears, ambivalences and anxieties” (McRobbie, 2004a). As young women come of age in a society where feminism is assumed yet repudiated, they are encouraged not to think rigorously about it, as it has supposedly been taken into account. Butler’s reading of Antigone therefore occasions an examination of whether young women question this issue rather than taking an ironic stance toward feminism that is prescribed by popular culture.

The death of feminism is particularly visible within the discourse of the Midriff (Malson et al., 2011), and popular culture is often the site where this death is most apparent (Goodman, Dretzin, & Ruskoff, 2001). The Midriff refers to the young woman who bares her body in order to assert her sexual agency, or who approves of the objectification of women as risqué and sophisticated, a chance to laugh with the boys. As McRobbie (2004b) noted, because feminism has been taken into account, it is presumed that women may now choose to present themselves
as hyperfeminine and highly sexualized without capitulating to the male gaze. Thanks to feminism, women can out-gaze men. The rise in the popularity of burlesque dancing as a pastime and a source of entertainment for women in the early 2000s exemplifies the midriff discourse. Whereas in the past women were objectified by burlesque, post-feminism offers burlesque as liberating, both as an aerobic activity and a night out with your friends or a date.69

The Midriff, like the other discourses of young womanhood discussed in Chapter Four, claims post-feminism as a site of agency for women. By embracing images formerly seen as sexist, Midriffs are said to be reappropriating sexism in a liberatory manner. However, there is clearly some cognitive dissonance at work here. In their study of young women’s responses to sexist advertisements, Malson et al. (2011) found that although young women overtly articulate post-feminist beliefs, their responses to the advertisements indicate that they do in fact find the objectification of women problematic. Similarly, Aapola et al. (2005) note that young women who do not identify as feminists will still use the language of feminism to describe what they view as gender inequity or sexism. Some social scientists attribute this practice to the individualism present within many discourses of young femininity that encourage young women to reject the essentialism of the category of “womanhood” (Budgeon, 2001; Sharpe, 2001). As McRobbie (1991) theorizes, an ethic of individualism is also promoted through popular cultural texts. Young women learn that they must compete with one another in order to find work, be popular, and find a romantic partner. This individualism also prohibits identification with groups, which in turn makes feminism seem like an undesirable label because it would link young young

69 Another well-documented example of the midriff in British culture is the iconic, larger-than-life Wonderbra billboard advertisements that loomed over the high streets in 1990s London featuring the supermodel Eva Herzigova in her underwear with playful copy such as “Hello, Boys” and “Or Are You Just Pleased to See Me?” (McRobbie, 2004; Malson et al., 2011).
women to a movement that is not only passé but seems contrary to their beliefs about how to obtain social goods.

The Ophelia and Girl Power discourses function in much the same way in support of post-feminism. The Ophelia discourse asserts that young women are vulnerable to the effects of popular culture and require protection from it (Aapola et al., 2005). Here, a certain normative developmental narrative is assumed. The assumption is that young women are nurtured in a supportive home environment and that media exposure is anathema to their continued development. The antidote for at-risk young women is to spend more time being nurtured by their families. However, if a young woman’s family life is not nurturing and supportive and fails to encourage her to succeed in socially acceptable ways, she has no recourse. Moreover, the Ophelia discourse also suggests that young women are passively experiencing the effects of media rather than engaging with media or thinking critically about it. And, as I suggested in Chapter Four, even when young women seem complicit in gender-stereotyped behavior, it is important to consider the meanings they are making to rationalize this behavior that we may misread as passive receipt of effects (McRobbie, 1991; Walkerdine, 2007).

The Girl Power discourse suggests that adolescence is a time of power, and if girls cannot access this power, there is something wrong with them. Additionally, it creates a sense that during this period of their lives it is valuable to have pluck, but for grown women to exhibit this trait is somehow “girlish” (Aapola et al., 2005). What results is a sense that adolescence is a time for rebellion, but after that point, one must put such childish things aside. The need for theories such as emergent adulthood speaks to the resonance of this belief, which creates a division between women and girls that further marks the appeal of post-feminism for young women, who
come to believe that any rebellion of their mother’s generation cannot be appropriate for their own (Aapola et al., 2005, Harris, 2004). Further, while the Girl Power discourse takes its name from the Riot Grrl movement, it bears little resemblance to its DIY punk rock origins. Because the girl power of Riot Grrls seemed aggressive and angry, it was tempered by critics and then by marketers who saw an opportunity to seize this language to sell products to women and girls. In an ironic twist, Girl Power came to stand for compliance with social norms rather than their problematization.

In both cases, feminist goods are reinterpreted in a manner that is palatable to social norms. Normative notions of family life and youth development are imposed through the Ophelia discourse, suggesting that young women who do not have these support systems are at risk. This creates a binary of the girl who is at risk and the can-do girls who will succeed because of their normative path (Harris, 2004). The specter of Antigone, whom Creon attempts to force into a counternarrative role, is apparent here. Traces of her story can also be seen in the fact that developmental narratives such as Ophelia and Girl Power force girls to choose to identify with their childhood ways or to move forward to adulthood and give them up. Failure to make this choice results in melancholia, and ultimately death, for Antigone. The false binary of kinship and the social denies the ways in which social views of family relationships impact our discourses on young people. However, for at-risk Ophelias, the melancholy of childhood is compounded by the discourse’s encouragement to remain within the protective space of the family regardless of whether that space is truly supportive, until the onset of adulthood, when this cocoon of security will no longer be necessary. How can such sheltered young women avoid melancholic
attachment? Like Antigone, they must seek recognition in the public sphere, despite the rhetoric of the Ophelia discourse.

Girl Power suggests that young women are depicted as happy-go-lucky consumers rather than as questioning the ways in which girlhood is a product. Similarly, the Midriff discourse suggests that young women may control the male gaze rather than problematizing the gaze per se. In both cases, a binary structure is imposed by discourses that offer young women a false choice, one in which feminism is not an option. Young women do not have to embrace feminism per se because these discourses claim that feminism has been taken into account. Again, Antigone’s ghost is visible here, as the voice of feminism buried in the rhetoric of these discourses moves young women who do inhabit feminist positions into melancholic spaces; those who are not feminist find no encouragement to consider the role that gender plays in their lives at all, because it has supposedly been taken into account. While the zinesters and bloggers in this study express these typical sentiments, their writings serve as inquiries into their personal lives which destabilize hegemonic discourse through their public articulation and challenge the silencing and repudiation of feminism. In what follows, I explore zinesters’ and bloggers’ questioning stance toward feminism.

Young Women and Post-feminism

The relationship that young women have to the notion of post-feminism is complicated by the fact that, as many social scientists, scholars of contemporary girls’ studies, and cultural studies have noted, at the same time that girls may articulate post-feminist beliefs, or even antifeminist ones, they also articulate feminist ones as well (Malson et al., 2011; Walkerdine,
2004, 2007; McRobbie 1991; Harris, 2001, 2004). The ambiguity that young women have toward feminism is not surprising, given the negative attention it receives in both the media and subtextually within hegemonic discourses of young femininity. If, as McRobbie (2004a, 2004b) held, feminism is always already taken into account in the post-feminist world, it is no wonder that young women who sense that this is not the case simultaneously articulate both feminist beliefs and a disdain for the term “feminism.”

In my study, only two young women identified as feminist: Amber, zinester of *Culture Slut*; and Lizzie, blogger of *Diary of a Fat Teenager*. Danielle, zinester of *Cherry Blossom*, *Cherry Pie* writes extensively about gender but does not identify as feminist. Stephanie, the blogger of *Wooty Woot*, comes out against feminism. The other two bloggers did not deal with gender; however, they did discuss their heterosexual dating lives, as did zinester Ashlee of *Regeneration*. Sabrina, zinester of *Four Horsemen*, writes about being a young parent. Katie, the zinester of *Aubade*, did not cover any of these topics. Below, I will look at the writings of Lizzie and Stephanie, who directly address feminism. To conclude, I will make some remarks about the writings of Danielle and Amber, who write about gender and its intersections with race, class, and sexuality but do not discuss feminism per se. However, I assert that their writings are important forms of feminist inquiry as public articulations of their personal lives.

“*I hate feminism*”70*: Stephanie on post-feminism*. Stephanie, the blogger of *Wooty Woot*, wrote an entry called “I Hate Feminism!” (October 22, 2010). Stephanie exhibits post-feminist sentiments yet also expresses cognitive dissonance about exactly what feminism is. Stephanie’s writing highlights the ways in which hegemonic discourses of femininity focus on individualism,

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stressing the importance of young women achieving on their own and making their own way. I argue that Stephanie’s articulation of this sentiment is similar to Antigone’s view of the importance of her individual acts in that she does not see the connections to her family and community implicit within them. Through her critique of feminism, Stephanie also provokes her reader to question her account of equality; it is possible that she is questioning this account herself, as it is inconsistent throughout the post.

Stephanie’s antifeminist blog post occurs in the wake of email spam with a link to a pornographic web site that was sent to several student listservs. A female student wrote an editorial about the fact that though students were outraged about email lists being hacked, attention was not paid to the type of content sent to the lists. In her response, Stephanie disapproves of the “loud-mouthed feminists of today,” yet she also asserts that the social gains earned by the suffragists were important policy changes. Malson et al. (2011) noted that it is not uncommon for young women to hold contradictory views about feminism; on one hand, Stephanie believes that she is a post-feminist, but on the other hand, she articulates feminist beliefs such as the importance of legal rights for women on her blog.

As children, girls should be taught the same things and allowed into the same academic programs [as boys]. And this has already been accomplished. Aside from making sure sexual harassment happens as little as possible, I feel that there is no need for feminism (sic) action. (Stephanie, *Wooty Woot*, October 22, 2010, “I Hate Feminism!”)

Stephanie’s comments confirm the post-feminist view that feminism is passé and has been taken into account (McRobbie 2004b; Aapola et al., 2005). She seems quite assured that equality has been achieved.
In her further attempt to discredit feminism, Stephanie explores the individualism that post-feminist discourses such as Girl Power promote, to a radical extent:

As an aside, I hate it when people are so sensitive. If someone insults and offends you, let them be and ignore them. I don’t care if people are racist—they can go ahead and be racist. I actually think that it’s okay if racism is widespread if public policy doesn’t reflect racism at all. Same goes for feminism.

Here, Stephanie is staking out a claim of extreme individualism, which is a central element of the proliferation of post-feminism. She is attuned to the post-feminist message that indicates that young women must act as individuals; the loss of feminism further underscores the need that McRobbie (1991) identifies for girls to compete with one another for social goods, and here we see a striking manifestation of this belief.

Stephanie makes the following separatist claim at the end of her post, which further instantiates her radical individualism: “And women need to take the initiative to act differently and change it themselves, they cannot have men help them change” (Wooty Woot, October 22, 2010, “I Hate Feminism!”). As a female engineering student who wonders within this post if she was the beneficiary of affirmative action, she also believes that she should be expected to work just as hard as her male colleagues to succeed in school. The value she places on women’s independence also underscores the individualism that post-feminism feeds; rather than building coalitions with male colleagues, she sees women as responsible for succeeding within the system without internal support.

It would be easy to dismiss Stephanie’s post as the writings of a young woman who actually knows nothing about feminism. As an author and researcher, this was certainly tempting, because it is difficult to know what to make of her declaration. However, as I read the
post, I was struck not only by the contradictions present in her logic, but also the fact that she wrote about feminism at all, since post-feminism suggests that young women do not need to think about feminism because society has already taken it into account. Despite her post-feminist claims, I see Stephanie’s post as grappling with feminist ideas—in particular, the meaning of equality. She notes that boys and girls have the same opportunities, but still acknowledges that women have work to do on their own to achieve the same status as men in society. The tension between these two ideas demonstrates that Stephanie is questioning the foundational claims of post-feminism, which suggest that equality has been achieved and need not be questioned. In spite of her strong assertions, she is ambivalent about what constitutes equality. Such questioning may be viewed as a response to McRobbie’s call for young women to seriously interrogate post-feminist discourses, despite its assurance that this is not necessary. While Stephanie’s post is antifeminist, its engagement with questions of equality challenge its unquestioned common sense status.

“Seeing it in my family”\textsuperscript{71}: Lizzie on the loss of feminism. Lizzie, blogger of \textit{Diary of a Fat Teenager}, claims in her “About Me” page that her blog is a feminist space. As discussed in the previous section, it is apparent in reading Lizzie’s blog that she is becoming increasingly aware of the foreclosures at work within her life. The social stigma against fatness is at work against her expressions of self-esteem, yet her compulsion to engage with the trolls who leave angry comments on her blog suggests that Lizzie is still in the process of articulating the ambivalence she feels about her weight. Similarly, she is also ambivalent about the choice she seems forced into making between her love for her family and respect for her father and her

\textsuperscript{71} Lizzie, \textit{Diary of a Fat Teenager}, July 24, 2008, “Intoxicating.”
desire to move away from their political views toward more progressive ones. She is able to reckon with these issues on her blog because it is a hybrid space, combining elements of the public and private but outside the sphere of kinship.

While on a family vacation, Lizzie overhears her family members make a number of sexist, ageist, and racist remarks and feels flustered and angry. “These whole two weeks have been a strange experience for me. This is the first time since knowing about feminism, privilege, and the like. And I can’t believe how much of it I am seeing in my family” (Lizzie, *Diary of a Fat Teenager*, July 24, 2008, “Intoxicating”). Lizzie notes here that her worldview is changing due to her inquiry into feminism. As a result of this political awakening, she sees her family’s behavior as offensive and upsetting. Yet she also indicates that her feminist beliefs are alienating her from her family and may serve to isolate her from them.

Beyond her family’s disdain for her beliefs, Lizzie is also aware of its feminism’s lack of appeal to her peers. Below, she indicates an understanding of the stakes involved in taking up the feminist cause in an era of post-feminism:

I know whenever a lot of girls my age hear the word feminist, they think “Man-hating, single, ugly, crazy”—you know, all the stuff you are fed through the media. I used to think that too, but I am ever so happy I don’t anymore. It is inspiring to read about women doing things other than just trying to lose weight and look pretty and get a man. Plus, you learn to recognize the way women are treated through (sic) advertisements. (Lizzie, *Diary of a Fat Teenager*, June 1, 2008, “Tips to Boost Your Self-Confidence”).

Lizzie’s encouragement of other young women to embrace feminism by acknowledging its marginal status defies the pull of post-feminism, although she is clearly aware that dominant discourses of young womanhood endorse the view that feminism is not only unnecessary but anathema to heterosexual romance. Lizzie’s blogging on behalf of feminism refutes its
marginalization and publicly addresses the difficulties of taking up feminist beliefs when both one’s culture and family do not share these values. However, it also articulates her sensibility that it has already been lost and that its resurrection may come at a great cost to her. This act is not unlike Antigone’s, whose engagement in the public sphere reveals her impossible allegiances to her family and its entanglement with the state. However, unlike Lizzie, both Antigone and her family are outcasts, while at the same time they are enmeshed in the workings of the state.

“*I usually just drop hints*”\(^72\): Unspoken feminisms. Scholars of contemporary girls’ studies have argued that for many young women, defining feminism is not a priority, but their actions suggest third-wave feminisms that are in process as they consider the roles that race, class, gender, and sexuality all play in the lives of women (O’Brien, 1999, in Aapola et al., 2005). These studies note that young women often contemplate feminist ideas without articulating a particular feminism.

Although Danielle does not identify as a feminist in *Cherry Blossom, Cherry Pie*, the zine articulates many feminist themes, including inquiry into the intersection of race and gender. The zine revisits her childhood experiences as half Japanese and half Chinese. In one of her essays, “Beauty Miracles,” she writes about watching her aunt prepare, by putting on makeup and contact lenses, for a date with a boyfriend of whom some family members do not approve because he is Japanese. Danielle prays that someday she, too, will be a beautiful teenager, despite the fact that she is half Japanese herself. “Beauty Miracles” intimates feminism, in that it problematizes the correlation of desirability with race and foregrounds the fact that Danielle has grown up in a culture in which her sensibilities about beauty were shaped by standards that did

\(^72\) Amber (2009), *Culture Slut* #19, p. 17.
not consider her beautiful, both within her own family and in society at large. Danielle’s experiences with beauty culture highlight the impossibility, due to constraints of kinship, of being a woman according to the acceptable terms laid out by one’s society.

Amber, who writes the zine *Culture Slut*, identifies herself as “a crazy angry strange shy queer feminist girl” (p. 24). While she does not discuss feminism in her zine, it is clearly a value to her, as she spends most of her zine claiming, discussing, and inquiring into her queer identity. In one essay, she discusses the fact that she doesn’t like coming out but also doesn’t want anyone to assume that she is straight:

> I don’t like coming out so I usually just drop hints until people figure it out on their own or straight up ask me how I identify… I just don’t like the assumption that I’m straight. I don’t like the way the whole world seems to assume that everyone they know is straight unless they are told otherwise. My mom once told me that she believes that coming out should either be expected of everyone, or no one. (Amber, 2009, *Culture Slut* #19, p. 17).

Amber’s disdain for assumptions about her identity seem particularly anathema to post-feminist tropes. To Amber, nothing should be taken into account or assumed, indicating her value on the inquiry process, both personally and as a cultural value. Her mother’s suggestion that everyone come out suggests an ongoing public discourse about sexuality and identity, which Amber’s zine seems to encourage as well by example.

**IV. “I Wish This Issue Came to Some Sort of Conclusion, But It Does Not.”**

In all the examples above, the zinesters and bloggers refuse counternarrative positions. Stephanie, who posits herself as post-feminist, is actually grappling with her beliefs about the nature of equality. Lizzie, becoming more radical in her own views, explores the ways in which

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73 Amber (2009), *Culture Slut* #19, p. 25.
moving toward feminism may alienate her from others in her life and challenges this foreclosure with her blogging practice. Danielle and Amber do not define their feminism per se, but their engagements with feminist ideas, including intersections of race and gender and sexuality and identity, suggest that they are also engaged in feminist inquiry through their writing. In all of these cases, the reader is given a story that ends in aporia; the inquiry is ongoing and no resolution is met. As Amber notes at the end of her zine,

I wish this issue came to some sort of conclusion, but it does not. I’m still confused, I’m still frustrated, and I’m still processing my thoughts. Sometimes I think I’d like to live a double life, have a boyfriend on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and a girlfriend on the remaining days. Perhaps I’m doomed to always want what I cannot have. I don’t know. All I know is that I’ve finally said what needed to be said, for now. (Amber, 2009, *Culture Slut* #19, p. 25)

The zinesters and bloggers in this study maintain an ongoing practice of inquiry through their zines and blogs. The fact that they undertake this inquiry in a hybrid space where readers and authors can meet between the public and private provides an important opportunity for educators and academics to engage with them in a hermeneutic dialectic. By engaging with this work, educators are in a position to join this inquiry and work toward understanding the role that feminism plays in the lives of young women. However, these articulations can only shape discourse if readers engage with them in ways that allow the authors to maintain their subjectivity and their aporetic stances. How educators as readers can begin this process is the subject of my concluding remarks.
Chapter Seven
Recognition and Reading: A Pedagogical Practice

I. Introduction

Antigone participates in public discourse by burying her brother against the king’s wishes. She spawns debate about this matter, but moreover, she brings her entire past to bear within the public sphere, as both the niece of Creon and the daughter of Oedipus. Her participation demands a reconsideration of the relationship between kinship and the social (Butler, 2000). As Butler suggests, Antigone enters the public sphere with personal concerns, and these concerns trigger a series of inquiries that have ramification upon both her particular situation and relationship of kinship and the state more generally, which ultimately impact ancient Greek life. As contemporary readers of her story, we may also learn from Antigone’s plight as we consider the ways in which personal matters impact our public participation. We may read zines and blogs with similar questions in mind.

I have also argued that the processes of zining and blogging are constitutive of discursive spaces where subjectivities are negotiated and shaped, while at the same time contributing to larger discourses on young womanhood. As I have shown, zinesters and bloggers use their blogs as spaces of inquiry. Their inquiries challenge hegemonic discourses of young womanhood. These practices are also constitutive of hybrid spaces, where the boundaries between public and private are challenged and where readers may engage with authors in third spaces of enunciation, where authorial subjectivity may be preserved (Bhabha, 1994).
In this chapter, I return to the practice of reading and discuss the ways in which educators and academics may establish reading practices as a form of hermeneutic inquiry in which they engage with youth-authored texts. The subjectivity work that young people initiate in zining and blogging practices requires an audience, and by participating as readers, we may join this audience as participants. The question this chapter aims to explore is whether and how educators, as adult readers of personal writings by young people, can preserve both the particularity of the authors and the authenticity implicit in their work while still using such work to rethink broader claims about discourses of female adolescence. I argue that educators should engage with these texts but allow these practices to remain out-of-school subjectivity work. Zines and blogs need not be brought into the classroom as assignments; rather, educators should engage with them in what Bhabha (1994) terms a “thirdspace of encounter,” where reader and author may meet, acknowledging the partialness of their knowledges of one another and allowing their differences to enhance their limited understanding of the other’s position.

This chapter will contain two sections. In the first section, I will describe the radical hope articulated within the zining and blogging practices of the young women in my study. Finally, I will outline the ways in which hermeneutic work done by educators through the act of reading zines and blogs and showing quiet support for the writing that young women do outside of school is a subtle yet critical in which we can participate in their process.

II. Hope in the Age of Post-Feminism

In Chapter Six, I argued that the zinesters and bloggers in this study circumvent melancholia by using their zining and blogging practices as an occasion to articulate the traces of
lost objects or ideals, in an effort toward moving forward with the traces of what was lost still within their psyches. This work also constitutes interventions that problematize categories such as gender and kinship and unpack the socially contingent nature of these delineations. Like Antigone’s action, undertaken as a particular burial, these writings speak to both larger themes and often to losses that are ungrievable due to foreclosures put in place by hegemonic discourses. These writings can be read as a response to the concern that young women in the post-feminist era have no need to speak, thanks to feminism’s having been taken into account by hegemonic discourses. As McRobbie (2004a) notes:

If the subaltern still cannot speak and the young non-subaltern no longer thinks she needs to speak74, then the loss of feminism is indeed palpable. Butler’s Antigone’s claim is also a claim for seriousness and radicality in sexuality, family life and in political culture. (McRobbie, 2004a, p. 509)

While this is a very valid concern, zines and blogs provide examples of young women speaking, questioning, and inquiring toward subjectivity, and through this work, they also make contributions to public discourses on young womanhood. The writings of zinesters and bloggers in this study demonstrate that some young women do need to speak, and some respond to what McRobbie views as Butler’s call for serious consideration of issues that impact their lives. The work of zinesters and bloggers may therefore serve as a sign of hope for feminist educators and academics who recognize the importance of the participation of young women and girls in order to sustain feminist inquiry within educational spaces and society at large.

As I discussed in the last chapter, zines and blogs are not narratives that come to a logical conclusion; they are ongoing practices that often lead the zinesters and bloggers to further

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questioning. As discussed previously, the blogger Sarah of 6Birds writes, “The more that I blog just shows how much more I need to share and see what others say” (October 13, 2010, “In My Shoes”). Amber, the zinester of Culture Slut, similarly notes that her zining process does not end with an issue: “I wish this issue came to some sort of conclusion, but it does not. I’m still confused, I’m still frustrated, and I’m still processing my thoughts” (Amber, 2009, Culture Slut #19, p. 25). Both Sarah and Amber indicate the importance of pursuing an ongoing practice of inquiry through zining and blogging. In both cases, they indicate that their writing has brought them to more questions and requires them to undertake further inquiry. Like other zinesters and bloggers in this study, the sustained effort that blogging and zining require contributes to the sense of hope that they ultimately derive from the work they undertake in these spaces.

“The Hope is What Holds It All Together.”

Sabrina, the zinester of Four Horsemen, expresses hope for the future through a realization about her family’s past brought on by a reunion with a Bruce Springsteen cassette. In her essay “On Springsteen,” her encounter with this cassette brings about a rethinking of the past that ultimately gives her hope for the future. She recalls as a child being annoyed by her mother’s singing along to Springsteen during trips in the family car. However, now driving the family car herself, she rediscovers the tape and, as she listens, finds meaning in the songs she hadn’t seen as a child. Brought to tears by the pathos of Bruce’s lyrics, she writes, “You can hear the painful [sic] and the longing and it makes me long for something, too, but there is hope there, way down underneath it all. The hope is what holds it all together” (Sabrina, p. 9).

Sabrina notes that hearing Bruce Springsteen makes her long for something that she doesn’t name. As I argued in Chapter Six, Sabrina, who is a twenty-year-old mother of a two-year-old, is somewhere between adulthood and childhood: Although she is a mother herself, she still lives at home with her parents, goes to school, and participates in family life. Her memory of her mother, who once annoyed her by singing along so loudly, has new resonance as her experiences have expanded and changed. This reflective work is indicative of the ongoing process of subjectivity work. As Sabrina’s context evolves, her reflections upon this context make important contributions to her subjectivity. However, the fact that she undertakes this reflection within the hybrid space of her zine makes it available to her readers. Sabrina invites us to meet her in this space, consider this occasioning of hope, and join her in further inquiry toward the hope that is beneath the surface of her stories.

Katie’s zine, *Aubade*, describes a similar feeling inspired by a visit to her old college town. Looking back on the sanctuary of college life, she is wistful, but acknowledges that she cannot return to the past: “My life in Harrisonburg was contained and mostly happy and comfortable, but the world is so much bigger and unpredictable, and there is no turning back” (p. 23). As discussed in Chapter Six, the desire to move to the future despite the nostalgic tug of what we are asked to leave behind in childhood is a prevalent theme among these zinesters and bloggers. I read Katie’s declaration about the world as indicative of a desire to engage with it, accompanied by a parallel desire to maintain the memories of her college life. As I argued in Chapter Six, rather than maintaining a debilitating melancholic attachment to the past, Katie, like many of the zinesters and bloggers in this study, takes a stance of inquiry through her zining practice, which poses questions about the possibility of moving into the future while holding on
to part of the past. This inquiry is a hopeful practice that invites readers to join in considering a hopeful future based on reflective and critical engagements with the past.

As McRobbie (2004a, 2004b) notes, Butler’s account of Antigone’s story occasions a meditation on Antigone’s fate as similar to the fate of feminism within the current climate of the so-called post-feminist era. Feminism, we are led to believe, has been taken into account and absorbed into culture as common sense. This notion is present in hegemonic discourses of young womanhood, most problematically the discourse of the Midriff, which encourages young women to reclaim sexism by embracing images and concepts of women that were once problematized by feminism. McRobbie notes that what Antigone provides, through Butler’s reading, is an occasion for feminists to assume what she terms “a rightful quietness” (2004a, p. 518) and consider new spaces outside the realm of politics where feminism may have occasion to grow. One such space she posits is pedagogical space. In the next section, I will explore the ways in which educators may read zines and blogs as one possible pedagogical space. However, I argue that this work should be done through reading them and working toward an understanding of the ways in which they articulate hope for the future, question dominant discourses, and formulate nascent feminisms.

III. Teaching Antigone: Educational Implications

The question of whether and how educators can support the subjectivity work of their students is frequently posited in the field of teacher education. Well-meaning teachers often wish to help students become empowered through their schoolwork and seek assignments that communicate to students that educators want to make school a hospitable place for them as a
diverse group of individuals. Stephens et al. (2007) summarize the call many of the best teachers find themselves responding to: “Adults, as cultural workers…need to create pedagogical practices that provide the conditions through which young people actually learn about and understand their personal stake in struggling for a future in which social justice and political integrity become the defining principles of their lives” (Stevens et al., 2007, p. 121). This call to teach makes several important claims about the role of the teacher. First, it suggests that an educator’s job is to help young people recognize the importance of social justice and, moreover, to encourage them to feel like stakeholders in that process. Second, in order for such a call to be heeded, students must have an understanding of their stake, which begs the question of whether all students feel that they have a stake in the political workings of the public sphere; it is possible that many of them feel that they do not. Implicit in this notion is also the idea that school is a space where such a feeling of inclusion in the wider world can be imparted to students. While I agree with this claim in theory, to ask such a thing of educators under the current social and political conditions is a huge request. The question then must be posed: How can educators create such dynamic yet self-revelatory pedagogical practices?

In attempting to create pedagogical spaces that are politically and personally charged, well-intended educators often look for ways to engage students that speak to the students’ practices outside of school and allow them to articulate subjectivities and engage with a larger public. Many discover modes of personal writing such as zines and blogs and attempt to bring them into the classroom as exercises through which students can express themselves more authentically within school assignments. The thinking behind such practices is that, by

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76 For a detailed account of the notion of various callings to the profession of teaching, see Hansen, D. (1995) *The Call to Teach* New York: Teachers College Press.
addressing students through assignments modeled after literacy work they may choose to do during their out of school time, educators will engage students in a more meaningful way at school as well. Literacy research has demonstrated, however, that transposing the activities from students’ free time into the classroom does not draw students in (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004; Knobel & Lankshear, 2002; Moje, 2000). For example, research on the zining practices of youth has acknowledged the fact that building zining into the curriculum is counter to the practice of zining itself. The classroom is not capable of creating the discursive space necessary for this sort of literacy work to be as potent as it is when girls initiate the writing on their own (Guzetti & Gamboa, 2004; Knobel & Lankshear, 2002).\textsuperscript{77}

In this section, I will argue that zining and blogging in the classroom cannot form hybrid spaces to the extent that such work taken on by young people outside of the classroom is capable. Rather than absorbing zining and blogging practices into the curriculum, educators can better serve their students, and the educational community, through engagement with these texts as readers within a third space.

While reading zines and blogs is a subtle way to participate in the subjectivity work of young people, I argue that the third space that educators create with zinesters and bloggers will positively impact their understanding of and ability to advocate for alternative discourses of youth culture, and young womanhood in particular. It also preserves the hybrid spaces instantiated by the literacy work of young people outside the space of the school, yet allows the discourse they generate to enter that space through the contribution to discourse that educators make through their teaching practices. In this section I will briefly discuss two reasons why

\textsuperscript{77} These researchers, however, have acknowledged that teachers may wish to embrace the ethos of DIY culture in their classrooms, which is a core value of zinesters and a hallmark of the zining practice.
bringing out-of-school literacy practices into the classroom often fail. First, school is not a mediated public, and as I have demonstrated throughout the dissertation, this factor is a central element of zining and blogging practices. As such, I will further argue that the melancholic attachments students explore through their personal writing practices such as zining and blogging cannot be worked through within the space of a school. Finally, I will discuss ways in which teachers may engage in a hermeneutic reading practice of zines and blogs, interacting with them in a third space of encounter, and then bring their knowledge to their teaching practice and their academic discussion of youth culture and discourses of young womanhood in particular.

School’s Mediation

Throughout the dissertation I have argued that central to both zining and blogging practices is the fact that they take place within mediated publics. The fact that students engage with audiences comprised of both known and unknown members is significant to the subjectivity work in which they are capable of engaging within these spaces because they receive a particular type of recognition. Communication occurs between zinesters and their readers through letter writing and email and within online spaces such as social networking sites, wikis, blogs, and bloggers, and their readers may communicate through these methods as well as comments within the blog itself. These practices instantiate hybrid spaces that blur the boundaries between public and private.

However, unlike the school environment, no one is grading a zine or a blog; the power dynamic that exists between a blogger and her readers is not mediated by the roles of “teacher” and “student” as classroom encounters are (Ito, et al, 2010; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993;
Walkerdine, 1990). The work done on a zine or blog is done by choice within a community where young people choose to participate outside of the school environment, and although both zining and blogging practices are structured within the medium of print or on the Internet, their authors have the authority to control the content and appearance of a zine or blog without censorship. The writing is done for the mediated public, not in response to a set of guidelines, for a teacher, or to earn a grade.

Young people who write zines and blogs can speak in the vernacular of the streets, their homes, and their communities, while such language is generally not acceptable in the context of school assignments. When such informal language has been brought into the curriculum, it has flared controversy. Even progressive educators have argued that if schools are to educate children who will succeed in our current society, those schools must teach children to leverage the tools, including language, that signifies this power (Bourdieu, 1990; Delpit, 1995). As Holland (1998) argues, Antigone spoke in public using vernacular language. Rather than engaging in formal language, she spoke in the language of her home. Holland noted that this was one of the elements that made her intervention particularly powerful. While bringing vernacular language into the curriculum might create a particular kind of intervention, the impact it would have on the particular students who intervened in this way must be taken into account. In Antigone’s case, the power of the polis overcame her, despite the challenge she posed to its authority.

The space of the school also contributes to our notions of what sort of activities are appropriate there. Hannah Arendt, for example, noted that schools are often miscast as either public or private spaces, when in fact they not precisely either; they are neither a wholly
nurturing space such as the home nor a true public in the sense of equal participation. Arendt (1961) noted that schools are spaces where much of the activity can, and should, turn on the authority of the teacher. She argued that the teacher must accept responsibility for the world “as it is,” not as they might wish it to be.

However, some contemporary schools build curricula using child-centered pedagogies, which encourage the development of learning objectives based on the particular needs of students and often have a social justice focus (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Moje, 2000; Street, 1994). Within such schools, educators strive to build learning communities in which the curriculum supports the continued growth of students as self-aware and socially just. However, these concepts of social awareness and justice are often defined by the educators themselves, who occupy a position of power; and exercises in social justice may also feel somewhat limp when they are taken out of the larger social context and reconfigured for the classroom (Ellsworth, 1989; Santoro, 2009). Accordingly, Arendt cautioned against educating for social justice. To do so—to blur the line between education and politics—is to subvert young people’s own opportunities to remake the world in their own terms. Teachers must accept their authority, and in doing so, can create spaces for young people to exercise political freedom. In a similar sense, Arendt’s distinction between education and politics cautioned teachers who might attempt to blur the boundaries between school assignments and youth-led literacy practices like zining and blogging.

Despite the fact that schools are not quite public spaces, they are still situated in a social context and thus adhere to certain cultural norms. Thus, even the most well-intentioned educators must face certain challenges when addressing student subjectivities in the classroom. Students
who accept these norms as given, or who grow up with an understanding of these norms, tend to succeed in school environments (Delpit, 1995). Teachers have authority over students, which gives them the power to assign students work, grade that work, and make determinations about student progress through the educational pipeline. Students respond in varying ways to teacher authority. While some students accept the authority of their teachers as a given, others may not, and may choose to subvert teacher authority through rebellion that ranges from acting out to silence (Valenzuela, 1999). The complex relationship that students have with the space of the school as well as the authority present within this space is therefore quite different from the spaces youth encounter and help to create through their work in the mediated publics created by zining and blogging.

Literacy scholars such as Elizabeth Moje (2000) and Shirley Brice Heath (1983) have suggested that it is important for young people to engage in writing practices that are unrestricted, where they can use vernacular language to describe their experiences. I agree with Moje and Heath, but wish to push further to argue that young people need spaces for writing that are outside the space of the school. For many students, school is a space where they struggle against misrecognition (Delpit, 1995). When the values, language, and practices of one’s home are not reflected within the culture of the school, that student may not feel that school-sanctioned spaces are appropriate spaces to disclose the sort of information that the young women in this study, all of whom blog or zine outside of school, share within their writing practices. For example, Moje’s (2000) research on student writing shows that when students knew they would be asked to publicly share their writing with classmates, they tended to limit their writings to topics explicitly suggested by an assignment or teacher. While it is possible to argue that these
students were using silence as a form of resistance and self-protection against social critique within their classroom (Leroy, 1996), and this is most certainly the case, I also argue that students are backed into a melancholic position by curricular requests for their personal stories when those stories do not align with an assignment’s intention or the culture of a school.

**Melancholia in the Classroom**

As Fivush (2010) argues, one issue that often arises in analysis of feminist autobiography is the ways in which an author is situated within her cultural milieu. The interplay of race, gender, and class impacts the types of experiences a woman will have and subsequently, how one will communicate these experiences. The historical era, cultural space, and physical place of one’s experiences and writing all impact the degree to which an author can exercise her voice. She noted, “Thus, power emerges from place, and voice emerges from power” (Fivush, 2010, p. 90). Fivush also noted that power is relational and always in process; a young woman who may feel she has powerful contributions to make to a given discourse online, like Lizzie, who writes avidly on her blog about fat acceptance, may feel silenced within the space of her school because power functions differently in these two spaces. Above, I argued that mediated publics are particularly rich spaces in which to explore these power relations, while school is often a less desirable space for such work. Here, I will argue that forcing young women to disclose personal stories in a classroom context ignores these power relations and can place them in a melancholic position in relation to the hegemonic narratives that are expected and acceptable within the context of school.
For example, consider a school assignment that asks young people to disclose details of their personal lives: a college acceptance essay that asks students to write about a challenge and how they overcame that challenge. This question asks students to assess what they consider challenging, relative to their life experiences, but on another level, they are asked in subtext to consider the challenges they think other students will reveal in order to pick an appropriate story to share in this venue. As Moje (2000) notes above, students often decline to participate in the sharing of such assignments. Some feel they are being asked in a sense to “out” themselves as different. These students must make a choice about whether to provide a story that aligns them with their peers and the expectations of the assignment (to give the “right” kind of story) or to give their own story that does not necessarily meet the expectations of their peers and the curriculum. In giving the “appropriate” story or accepting a particular story as the right one, they subvert their own story (Britzman, 1998; Hochman & Stillwagon, 2010). Because of the nature of school assignments, in that they are graded and take place within the power structure of the school, students may not be able to move through the stages of melancholia that allow for an articulation of the lost object (the story of their past) and include ambivalence toward the lost object and their new life. If they choose to tell a story that satisfies the social or curricular norm a particular assignment requires, they are in some sense capitulating to this norm. Implicit here is the idea that in order to become an educated person, per the norms of schooling, one must give up the stories of one’s past that do not quite “fit.” The regulatory ideals posited within the classroom function to create a status quo. Moreover, the space of the school does not allow for the melancholic questioning that zines and blogs can facilitate to take place; ambivalence and the process of melancholic incorporation are difficult to fit into the space of a three-part thesis paper.
Antigone is melancholic because, under the circumstances, she can never give the “right” story. As the daughter of an incestuous marriage, she is always already implicated in a violation of this taboo, which underscores the relationship between kinship and the social. As I have argued throughout the dissertation, there is no way for Antigone to act within the space of the polis without the implications of her family relationships preceding her. Although Antigone claims that she buries her brother out of her duty to her family, she brings her entire past to bear through both this public act, and then again through her dialogue about the act with Creon and the Chorus. She does not want to give up her love for her family, despite its foreclosure by the social sanction. When students are asked to share their personal stories, similar stakes are at play. If their stories do not match up with social norms as they are articulated within the curriculum, and they are being evaluated on criteria based on these norms, they have no ground from which to speak.

This melancholia functions in a similar manner to that discussed earlier with regard to normative discourses of Girl Power and Ophelia, which both suggest that young women are empowered to choose yet provide only one “correct” choice. Zinesters and bloggers are able to exploit the discursive spaces afforded through practices where the relational powers are quite different from those that exist within the space of the school. Zinesters and bloggers may circumvent this need to tell the “right” kind of story by telling their stories in mediated publics, through which they may instantiate hybrid spaces that combine elements of public and private life, reality and fiction. By moving the practice of zining and blogging into the classroom, educators neglect to note the crucial role that the mediated public plays in these practices. School cannot provide an invisible audience. Without this type of mediation, the recognition that young
women may gain from these practices cannot be instantiated and the public–private boundaries remain intact.

*Counternarratives in the Curriculum*

When we ask students to give personal stories, as if to draw out their differences and make them public matters of discussion, this can also be viewed as a request for them to occupy a counternarrative position to the discourse of the classroom. This functions in much the same way that Creon’s attempt to force Antigone into a counternarrative position occurs, and her rejection of this counternarrative position through her death is not unlike the silence that some students choose when forced to give a story that may appear as a counternarrative when read against the tableau of the classroom norms. Returning to the example of the request that students write about a challenge and how they overcame this challenge, consider again how students determine what challenge to reveal. Fivush (2010) notes that part of our notion of what constitutes a normative life story has to do with what we consider a cultural norm at various stages of life. She gives the example of high school graduation as being a typical accomplishment by the age of 18. More than typical, she notes, this accomplishment is seen to be normative; thus, when a person is telling his or her life story, if he or she did not graduate from high school by 18, an explanation seems necessary. These norms, when observed in the classroom, establish a narrative-counternarrative binary, whereby any story that does not meet with these cultural norms requires additional explanation and qualification. As I have argued in previous chapters, the notion of normative ages and stages of development is problematic because it helps to instantiate this binary. Further, this need to explain a divergence from the
norm implies that young people whose stories diverge from the norm should speak to defend their stories. However, as Moje’s (2000) research demonstrates, many would prefer silence.

By forcing students into the counternarrative position from which they must explain themselves, we nurture melancholia in the curriculum (Hochman & Stillwaggon, 2010). Asking students to divulge these narratives is not a reasonable request unless we are prepared to assist them in unpacking the various ways in which the norms have been put in place and are willing to address ways in which schools could be spaces in which such work was safe, appropriate, and productive for young people. Such a project is far beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, what is possible is a modest consideration of the ways in which educators can help students maintain a connection to their home lives while they move through the educational system. I am not calling for a dismantling of organized education, but for a reconsideration of what is appropriate within the curriculum. As educators who care about the lived experiences of students, we need to care enough to recognize that their entire lives cannot be brought to bear within the space of school exercises. However, through considering the content of those lives, we may better make choices about how we ask students to represent themselves within the context of school assignments and how classrooms can be more hospitable spaces to students from any background.

It is, to be sure, problematic to parse the space of school from students’ lives as a whole. As Hull and Schulz (2001) note, it is a mistake to create a strict binary between school and out-of-school time, since so much of young people’s lives takes place within the context of school, or at least “the school day.” They warn against thinking of context as a container, imposing boundaries between in-school and out-of-school time that prevent interplay between the two, and
discourage us from taking lessons learned from work with young people outside the classroom into the classroom. For example, in order to conduct their study of zinesters, Guzetti and Gamboa (2004) found their study participants through a school and conducted many of their interviews at the girls’ school and with their classmates. This suggests that while school is a place where young people are compelled to spend time, the space it occupies in their lives may actually be quite marginal. This interplay between space and place in this case is worth further consideration, but here it is important to note that the connections that exist between the two are as worthy of note as the boundaries between them.

Thus, to conclude, I will discuss some ways in which educators can engage in hermeneutic practices such as the reading of zines and blogs in order to bring what these rich texts have to offer into the classroom. By learning about the lives of young women, educators may have an impact through the role of reader, and have an opportunity to reshape discourses of young womanhood through this engagement.

*Teachers as Readers*

Teachers are often interested in bringing texts and ephemera from youth culture into the classroom because, simply stated, these things are cool. The hope is that students will see that the teacher is making an attempt to meet them where they are and understand their cultural milieu by bringing it to light in the space of the school. To this practice I can only attribute the best of intentions. However, from a students’ perspective, this may be seen as an unwelcome advance by an authority figure into a youth space. Even the coolest of teachers will struggle to bring a zining
and blogging assignment into the classroom without instantly extinguishing the coolness of zining and blogging.  

When teachers bring zines and blogs into the classroom as part of an assignment, they are doing so from a position of power and authority within the classroom. This means that students who are asked to write zines or blogs as assignments are not doing so by choice; students asked to read zines and blogs are not coming to these texts through a mediated public. Rather, they engage with these texts through another level of mediation: the classroom.

However, this does not mean that teachers should deny themselves the pleasures of pop music, nor that they should ignore important cultural texts like popular music, zines, and blogs. Instead, I argue that teachers should take seriously the role of reader that is made available to them by zining and blogging youth. In Chapters Two and Five, I discussed at length my own hermeneutic practice, which I undertook in order to do the research for this study. Here, I will argue that teachers can also take up the role of hermeneutic reader, a subtle but powerful role that stands not in authority over but in conjunction and cooperation with an author. By inhabiting this role, teachers, academics, and other stakeholders with influence over educational discourses on young people can engage with zines and blogs as texts, and their authors as well, in ways that will influence discourse on youth subjectivities.

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78 I recall as a seventh grader feeling embarrassed for my young, hip history teacher who loved to write “Manic Monday” on the chalkboard and wink at us, to let us know that he also enjoyed the popular Bangles song of that title.
In Chapter Two, I argued per Heidegger (1969) that through hermeneutic study we do understanding. Understanding is an effort that we make; it is an ongoing process, and something that we must continuously do. In hermeneutic practices, the roles of both reader and author are crucial to the text because, in order to be fully realized, a text must be read (Freeman, 2007). This places considerable importance on the role of the reader; however, it is important to qualify this role somewhat. To do this, I turn to Barthes (1971), who uses the metaphor of the network to discuss texts. While a work of writing is a tangible (or, in the case of a blog, visible) document, a text can only be held in understanding. Implied in Barthes’ account is the notion of connection, a network that is established between the reader and the author, formed through dialectic. The efforts of the reader toward understanding this participation completes the circuit of meaning making. Thus, the act of reading is also a form of inquiry, like the act of writing.

However, at the same moment that the reader has this power to help actualize a text, she is also situated within a context through this practice. As a reader of the zines and blogs I read for this study, I gave a reading, based on my context as an academic, my gender, my race, and social class. My reading is one among many, rooted in my perception, and while I participate in the process of meaning making with these authors, so, too, do many readers. Thus, hermeneutics, while it empowers readers, acknowledges the partiality and continuous nature of our meaning-making efforts.

Further, as Bhabha (1994) suggests, in order to preserve subjectivities, readers and authors engage in this dialectic of meaning making within a third space of enunciation in which we must acknowledge the ongoing and partial nature of the meaning making practice. As
readers, we must acknowledge the biases inherent in this work. For example, when I engage with *Antigone*, I bring contemporary biases, readings of interpretive work, and even an academic agenda of my own. Holland (1998) points out that reclaiming a text in light of a contemporary feminist agenda has the tendency to give explanations for Antigone’s actions in current contexts, which render them less of a disruption than they actually were. Holland reminds us that Antigone is alienated from her own era by the fact of her family’s history. Her actions are a sort of intervention that speak to her political present, but do not serve to change the past.

However, Butler (2000) views Antigone’s story as an opportunity to meditate on contemporary feminism despite her ancient context. Butler’s argument acknowledges where Holland’s does not the ways in which the past is always already present in hermeneutic work. Just as Antigone cannot speak publicly without bringing the implications of her past losses to bear on the burial of her particular brother, contemporary readers cannot dismiss their cultural and social contexts when we take up her story, nor the stories of zinesters and bloggers. Holland overlooks the unconscious, unspeakable, and inaccessible qualities that the practice of reading any ancient text necessarily entails, particularly when we are using those texts as a way to gain traction on current political, social, or cultural issues, despite our best intentions to preserve difference. As Biesta (2006) mentions, we must engage in ways that attempt to preserve difference, yet there seems to be something very important about the tension that exists between that engagement and the ways in which we consider those engagements toward making meaning. It is here that I think the unique recognition within mediated and hybrid publics resides. As readers of zines and blogs, educators have an opportunity to explore this tension. As a reader of these texts myself, I have attempted to preserve some of this tension in providing readings of
zines and blogs that allow them to remain somewhat ambiguous. It is my hope that teachers may be willing to join in this practice of reading zines and blogs and meet these young women in a crucial space, a third space, where their ambiguities and the readers may meet. In this space, there is a possibility for encounters that may truly transform discourse about young womanhood.

Practically speaking, I view my study as an invitation to educators to read as many texts as they can from subcultural milieus of youth culture. This simple act of reading these texts and attempting to make meaning with their authors within a third space of enunciation provides an opportunity that is not available to us in other contexts. Teachers and students seldom meet in spaces where the power dynamic is such that their meanings are equally valued and even critical to the work at hand. Although the rhetoric of critical pedagogy suggests that young people can be empowered through making the classroom into a space of critical encounter (Carlson, D., & Dimitriadis, 2003; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Giroux, 1991) this is very difficult to accomplish in light of the mediations that schools, as social and cultural institutions, connote. Moreover, if zines and blogs are to maintain their authenticity as youth writings, bringing them into the classroom is contrary to this authenticity (Ellsworth, 1989).

Although I have argued that the zines and blogs in this study constitute hybrid spaces, which are between public and private, they are also youth spaces, and their authors are arguably speaking to other young people. However, within the mediated public space of a zine or blog, educators can join the invisible audience. Rather than commandeering this space, it is crucial for educators to participate as readers only and maintain, as McRobbie put it, “a rightful quietness” (McRobbie, 2004a, p. 518), a phrase she uses to describe the stance of openness and observation that in itself must be recognized as an important sort of action. The willingness to engage with
young people in this manner strikes me as crucial for changing discourses of young adulthood, and particularly young womanhood. The continuous practice of understanding that can be gained from such engagements acknowledges the significance of these writings to culture at large but also acknowledges that all knowing is partial, in process, and ongoing.

IV. Antigone’s Legacy

What is consistent is the over-shadowing, indeed displacement, of feminism as a political movement. It is this displacement which reflects Butler’s sorrowful account of Antigone’s life after death. Her shadowy, lonely existence, suggests a modality of feminist effectivity as spectral, she has to be cast out, indeed entombed for social organisation to once again become intelligible. (McRobbie, 2004b, p. 258)

Displaced by post-feminist discourses, McRobbie posed the question of the future of the feminism, noting that Butler’s reading of Antigone may serve as a helpful starting point for thinking about the issue. She suggests that just as Antigone is entombed, so, too, is feminism; however, considering the ways in which both met their demise may enable us to gain some purchase on the future of feminism. Here, Antigone’s plight is read not as analogous to that of contemporary young women; rather, contemporary young women may be able to resurrect Antigone, so to speak. In her analysis of Butler, McRobbie notes that some meditation on the future of feminism is necessary, and it may be the case that in order for academics to ascertain this, they may need to take on what she terms “a rightful quietness” (p. 518) in order to engage in future feminist encounters. I hold that within this quietness, academics with concerns about the future of feminism may want to listen to the voices of young women who write personal stories in public venues and, as I argued in Chapter Six, conduct feminist inquiry within their writing.
Following McRobbie, I also hold that reading ancient texts may be helpful in rethinking current feminisms. However, it is important to read these texts carefully, as I have argued, and engage with them in third spaces in order to preserve the difference between contemporary times and the past described in these texts. As Holland (1998) notes, we cannot refashion feminisms of the past to fit contemporary times; rather, we can use stories from the past, such as *Antigone*, to consider broadly the ways in which contemporary actions may serve as interventions within a contemporary context, as hers did centuries ago.

As contemporary readers of *Antigone*, we must keep in mind that the protagonist is unlike us (Holland, 1998). Holland cautions readers of ancient texts from using the past in order to support contemporary political arguments and encouraged us to let them remain different from the present day. Holland also reminds us that Antigone, during her own day, was different from the members of her community. As a daughter of Oedipus, as a young woman who came to speak in public on behalf of her brother in a manner that had both personal and political implications, she was very different from other women of her era, and yet, as a woman, had no real ground from which to speak in public. Nevertheless, she acts, and then she speaks in defense of her act—and, I have argued, her family, her past, and her confusion about whether and how she can move toward a future that prohibits her past and her loves. Similarly, I have argued, zinesters and bloggers use their platforms as important discursive spaces within mediated publics to negotiate their movement toward the future. As readers of their work, we must recognize our differences.

Throughout the dissertation, I have used scholarly texts to gain purchase on both *Antigone* and the writing of zinesters and bloggers. While these readings provide intellectual insight, as
Nussbaum notes, crucial to the hermeneutic project is to engage with a text on an emotional level:

A purely intellectual perception of this event that was not accompanied by “being borne” and by the flowing of tears would not, apparently, be a natural or full or good seeing. To perceive the particulars fully it may be necessary to love them. This suggests to us an implicit norm, as well, for our reading and interpreting. If we attempt to impede the flow of tears, if we try too hard not to be carried away, we may not be able to get all that the text offers. (Nussbaum, 1986, p. 70)

By loving the particularities of a text or character, I would argue, we do more than merely perceive them, we build a relationship with that text and its author. As Holland notes, preserving a character’s strangeness, rather than imposing our frameworks upon them, may serve to highlight our own questions in new ways while revealing more than we allow if we have a preconceived agenda as we approach it. I read Nussbaum in this instance as using the text *Antigone*, a tragic story that ends with mourning and “a less confident wisdom” (Nussbaum, 1980, p. 52), to remind us that only with an open heart can we persist with this ongoing hermeneutic work.

To conclude, I return to the idea that *Antigone* can be read as a story about a young woman on the verge of adulthood, rather than a story about a woman acting as a heroine motivated by either kinship or state. *Antigone*, read as “a meditation on unthinkable change and the terms in which such change may be possible” (Holland, 1998, p. 1123), opens the possibility that the text is foremost a hopeful story about how these processes change both the individual and the community. Antigone’s actions call into questions the past of Thebes, but more significantly they disrupt business as usual. The issue for Holland is not whether her actions recall the past, but how they offer new possibilities for the future of Thebes. Perhaps most significantly, *Antigone* reminds us that categories are unstable and that the spaces we define in
certain terms are being constantly redefined by the actions of a new generation. The very spaces in which these actions are undertaken are in a state of flux. Antigone herself suggests that, rather than heroines or definitive answers, what young people and academics alike need in order to consider questions of subjectivity are spaces in which we can pursue our hermeneutic work in a lifelong process toward understanding—in other words, a pleasant place to read.
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Appendix A
Evolution of Codes

Initial Codes

codes generated from readings of Antigone

melancholia
aporia
engagement with community
public/private distinction
feminism

Secondary Codes

additional codes that emerged through pilot coding exercise

invisible audience (or 4th Wall)
authorship
particularity
hope
being-for-others
place
space
Complete Code List (all codes generated through initial coding of zines and blogs)

4th Wall: talking to reader
Ambivalent: ambivalent toward issue, self, etc.
Aporia: condition of being both true and false
Authority: acting upon the author
Authority: encounters with authority figures
Authorship: author talking about being an author
Beauty
Being-for-others
Boundary
Community: sense of community built through practice of writing
Context: context of zinester or blogger
Create: impulse to create
Defining: defining the self, identity
Family
Feminism
Hope for the future/change
Hopelessness
Immediacy: reference to something intangible, unconscious
Invisible Audience: reference to audience, known or unknown, or the fact that there is an audience
Isolation
Language: taking action through language
Melancholia: Melancholic attachment to the past
Overwhelmed
Participation subsumed by community
Particularity: defining who you are, your project
Place: physical place
Practice: of writing a zine or blog
Public/private: Private lives articulated in public
Space: space of expression or articulation or discourse
Teen: Between childhood and adulthood
Ungrievable loss: loss of something you shouldn’t have loved in the first place, reflection on something in the past that cannot be grasped.
Refined Code List

(*bold* indicates code subsumed into a new categories)

4th Wall: talking to reader, referring to *invisible audience*

Authorship: your project *practice* of zining and blogging; *language*

Authority

Aporia: arguing both for and against something, uncertainty (*Ambivalent*)

Authority: encounters with authority figures

*Beauty*

*Being for others*

*Boundary*

Community: *sense of community built through practice of writing* (**participation; context**)

Immediacy: reference to something intangible, unconscious

*Create*—Subsumed by authorship

Defining: *defining the self, identity*

Family

Feminism

Hope for the future/change

*Hopelessness*

*Isolation*

Melancholia: Melancholic attachment to the past (**ungrievable loss**)

*Overwhelmed*

Place: *physical place*

Particularity: *defining who you are*

Public/private: *Private lives articulated in public*

Space: *space of expression or articulation or discourse*

Teen: Between childhood and adulthood
# Appendix B: Bloggers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blogger Name</th>
<th>Sarah Elizabeth</th>
<th>Lizzie</th>
<th>Stephanie</th>
<th>Mimi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6Birds</td>
<td>Diary of a Fat Teenager</td>
<td>Wooty Woot</td>
<td>I lyke meat pie/A Beautiful Trainwreck/Oh We’re living la dolce Vita</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogger Age (during coding range)</td>
<td>19-20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td>North Texas, rural</td>
<td>East Coast, suburban</td>
<td>California, Large City</td>
<td>Texas, college town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Education</td>
<td>Community College Student</td>
<td>College Student</td>
<td>College Student</td>
<td>College Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique Blog Traits</td>
<td>Glossary of terms, family members names, etc, that is linked to rollovers within text</td>
<td>Articulated mission of blog is to promote fat acceptance</td>
<td>Pre-writes many blog entries</td>
<td>No comments permitted on this blog; takes down blog twice during research period, changes name three times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevalent Themes/Topics</td>
<td>Rural life, family issues, blogging practice, moving toward adulthood</td>
<td>Fat acceptance, struggles with trolls</td>
<td>Technical aspects of blogging, childhood memories, college life</td>
<td>Poetry, moving toward adulthood, self-doubt, writing practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevalent Codes</td>
<td>Melancholia, particularity, 4th wall</td>
<td>4th wall, public/private, particularity, melancholia, authorship</td>
<td>Community, particularity, melancholia</td>
<td>Particularity, melancholia, community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Appendix C: Zinesters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zinester Name</th>
<th>Amber</th>
<th>Ashlee</th>
<th>Danielle</th>
<th>Katie</th>
<th>Sabrina</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zine Name and issue</strong></td>
<td><em>Culture Slut</em> #19 [coming out issue]</td>
<td><em>Regeneration</em> #6</td>
<td><em>Cherry Blossom, Cherry Pie</em> #2</td>
<td>*Aubade, #4 “The Virginia Issue”</td>
<td><em>Four Horsemen</em> #4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zinester Age (during this issue)</strong></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publication Date</strong></td>
<td>Spring 2009</td>
<td>Winter 2009</td>
<td>July 2006</td>
<td>May 2008</td>
<td>March 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Residence</strong></td>
<td>Montreal, Canada</td>
<td>St. Paul, MN</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>Virginia, D.C Area</td>
<td>Willingboro, NJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of Education</strong></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>Community College Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of zines</strong></td>
<td>24 (additional zine, <em>Fight Boredom</em>, has 5 issues)</td>
<td>6 (additional zine, <em>Flying with Broken Wings</em>, has 7 issues)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4 (additional zine “<em>Dimanche</em>” has 8 issues)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zine Style</strong></td>
<td>Short autobiographical essays</td>
<td>Continuous narrative</td>
<td>Short autobiographical essays</td>
<td>Short autobiographical essays</td>
<td>Short autobiographical essays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unique Zine Traits</strong></td>
<td>Coming Out Issue, collage of writing and stock images</td>
<td>Description of her first year living on her own</td>
<td>Reflections on race and gender</td>
<td>Reflections on childhood and early adulthood in Virginia</td>
<td>Zine is written over one week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prevalent Themes/Topics</strong></td>
<td>Queer identity, sexual assault, coming out, dating men</td>
<td>Independence, relationships, drug and alcohol abuse</td>
<td>Childhood memories, gender, ethnicity, moving toward adulthood, relationship with mother</td>
<td>Change, urban sprawl, impending adulthood</td>
<td>School, young parenthood, recipes, childhood memories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prevalent Codes</strong></td>
<td>Melancholia, particularity, ambiguity</td>
<td>Particularity, authorship, community</td>
<td>Particularity, melancholia, community</td>
<td>Melancholia, place, space</td>
<td>Melancholia, hope, particularity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>