Chapter 21
Measuring Enclosures and Efficacy in Online Feminism:
The Case of Rewire

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines Rewire, a website addressing reproductive health and justice. Leaning on Nielsen Norman Group's user-experience expertise, it analyzes the format of the website and conducts a close reading of its content. It further considers the organization's use of social media to engage activists. This is complicated by the work of Oser, Hooghe and Marien that illuminates how online mediums empower some individuals but simultaneously intensify the marginalization of those with limited internet access due to poverty, race, etc. The chapter's interdisciplinary approach is grounded in S. Federici's concept of enclosures, or the structural and ideological ways in which individuals are closed off from their Other to squelch group identities that would counter dominant ideologies. By highlighting the ways Rewire challenges and strengthens enclosures, this chapter proves the power of digital media while calling for improvements in how it is utilized to create social change.

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, H. Rosin wrote an article with the headline "The Patriarchy is Dead: Feminists, accept it"—playing into the overstated death/revival dichotomy that has plagued feminism since the 1980s. The article appears as a response to online feminists, who have built up a niche by providing feminist news and critique of patriarchal, capitalist and racial ideologies via blogs, websites and social media. In her article, Rosin asks whether feminists are too content to fight with micro-oppression to notice the strides made toward accomplishing long-term feminist goals—noting, "As a form of blogging or tweeting, pointing fingers is endlessly satisfying. But as a form of political expression, it's pretty hollow and out of tune with reality" (2013). Her critique of feminism as "out of tune with reality" misrepresents the vic-

tory of feminism and ignores the need to critique the continual work of dominant ideologies to subsume oppositional forces in innocuous ways (e.g. marketing, language) and overt (e.g. laws and policies). Yet, she does point to the critical question of whether online feminism, and online activism at large, can be an effective form of political expression. In 2014, M. Ganzer highlighted the effect of Operation Lollipop, a campaign created by anti-feminist trolls to trick feminists into tweeting controversial hashtags in order to create hostility around ideas espoused by some feminists. The campaign was successful, in so far as it tricked many feminists into using its hashtags before the ulterior motives were discovered, and provides an example of social media that appears to be angrily pointing fingers rather than acting as political expression for social change. However, other online campaigns have proven to be successful forms of political and public advocacy: the use of the hashtag #RenishaMcBride helped bring a Michigan case of an unarmed black woman who was shot to the national stage and mass media coverage (Conley, 2014); a crowd-sourcing map was created to help track sexual assault in Syria; one online campaign successfully pressured Susan G. Komen to reverse its decision to remove grants for Planned Parenthood; and another campaign pushed *Saturday Night Live* to hire a female African-American comedian (Plank, 2014). These examples bring hope for those who seek to find power online. But as activists, we must consider how online activism has a discernible effect on the institutions and ideologies it criticizes, whether or not it merely invokes outrage instead of affecting changes in public policy, how it can be used to unite activists for a common cause, and in what ways we can measure and qualify the success of the online activities.

In order to address these concerns, this analysis will focus on *Rewire*, an online publication centered on women's reproductive and sexual health and justice. Since its inception in 2006, it has become a reputable source within American-feminist social media circuits and reproductive health publications, as well as one of my daily news sources.[1] This analysis will delve into the content of the website as well as the organization's social media posts that I compiled during two, month-long periods of time. Along with gaining insight on user engagement, through analysis of the text in these Facebook and Twitter posts as well as the content of the articles linked to each post, I determined the top two topics addressed in each post to quantify the diversity of topics addressed and the intersectionality of conversations around race, gender, laws, etc.

This analysis will argue that through its subject matter, online format, and use of various social media, *Rewire* fights many of the enclosures that occur within patriarchal and capitalists systems. Enclosures, found and defined in the work of S. Federici (2009), are seen as the structural and ideological ways in which individuals are closed off from their Other to systematically squelch group identities that would counter the needs and ideals of hegemony. The fight to subvert enclosures is a necessary component of educating the public about the intersectionality of various power structures in order to push members of the public to seek change. Yet, when looking at the arguments asserted through its publication, we must also address alternative forms of enclosure that the blog inadvertently strengthens. By analyzing the ways in which *Rewire* interacts with the enclosures of society, I will highlight the interconnection of racial, economic, and gendered hierarchies at play, while simultaneously providing examples of the efficacy of online activism, and the challenges it faces during efforts to raise consciousness and incite change in the present.

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