

Chapter 8

Women Milbloggers: Narratives of Military Life

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ABSTRACT

The presence of feminist thought today is significant in theoretical and philosophical discourses about texts and technologies of text production. In this chapter, the authors raise a discussion about how personal narratives about military life and combat experiences, written and published by women on the Web, should be read and interpreted within the contemporary feminist tradition. The authors approach the minority group of women milbloggers as a diverse community, members of which have already developed complex hierarchies and conflicting gender politics. They provide critical analysis of a selection of blog posts by women milbloggers in which they address the traditionally male/masculine canons, such as military life and war. The authors suggest that Clair Colebrook's (2000) perspective on the role of the feminist political thought as "contamination" of patriarchal tradition is useful in a critical reading of women's military blogs today.

INTRODUCTION

Text is politics. Reading and writing is politics as well. Feminism is a practice of active political engagement with texts and text production, notable for experimenting with philosophical, historical, literary, and cultural texts, and especially in regard to questioning gender roles and domains of 'masculinity'. According to feminist philosopher

Clair Colebrook (2000a), "never a stable body of thought with a grounding axiom or system" (p. 4), the presence of feminist thought today is significant in theoretical and philosophical discourses about texts, and technologies of text production. This chapter addresses the problematic of placing contemporary narratives of military bloggers authored by women within contemporary feminist theory.

An abundance of scholarship on blogs is available today, as was not the case one decade ago. Despite being a remarkable phenomenon and a

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source of unique experiences easily available for research, blogs authored by military women is still a topic that has not been extensively studied. Military blogs (milblogs, for short) are Weblogs written by those who identify themselves as soldiers, veterans, spouses/partners/relatives of soldiers, as well as anyone related to the military in any way. 'Female military blog' usually stands for a blog written by a woman blogger. It is a relatively new blog category on the Web, and 'female military blogger' is a new identity available for women, but not exclusively. In this chapter, I use the term 'woman military blogger' instead of 'female military blogger', because 'woman military blogger' is a more inclusive term within the conceptual framework of my study that draws on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of becoming-woman and Colebrook's (2000a, b) views on feminism and the purpose of women's writing. In terms of numbers and influence, these bloggers make up a minority, but there is a general tendency for an increase in numbers of self-identified women military bloggers on the Web. This network of milbloggers is very diverse and has already developed very complex hierarchies in the blogosphere.

The problematic of placing women's milblog narratives – written in English by self-identified U.S. citizens – within the contemporary feminist theory can be interpreted in a variety of ways. On the one hand, milblogs by women can be read as stories supporting and even defending patriarchy in the military. On the other hand, women's milblogs can be read as stories of women emancipation, empowerment, and self-assertion. In this chapter, however, I take a more complex approach to reading women milblogs. I distinguish between three types of patriarchal women in the contemporary milblogosphere and provide examples of three approaches to reading milblog narratives. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1987) concept of becoming-woman and Clair Colebrook's (2000a, b) views on feminism and the purpose of women's

writing shaped the conceptual framework for my critical reading of contemporary milblogs by women soldiers and veterans along with military mothers and wives.

I start with an overview and critical reading of milblogs written by military mothers and wives. Though the major objective of my research is critical reading of women's milblog posts about their own experiences of serving in the military, the niche of milblogging mothers and spouses dominates contemporary milblogosphere. Despite the fact that most milblogging mothers and spouses have never served in the military, they are better represented on the Web than any other community of milblogging women (e.g., women soldiers or women veterans). Hence, the niche of military mothers and spouses will be addressed in this chapter as well. I will show in what way women milbloggers are supporting the American soldier ideal in their writing; for example, "the ideal of male virtue embodied in the warrior" (Elshtain, 1995, p. 54), a "citizen-warrior" embodying "militarized masculinity" (Sjoberg, 2010, p. 215), a "just warrior" (Elshtain, 1983), and even a "superman" (Enloe, 1993, p. 71), in addition to other contemporary "militarized forms of manliness" (p. 25).

Then I introduce the niche of 'female warrior milbloggers' and reflect on the pros and cons of taking a 'female perspective' when addressing the traditionally male canons, such as military life and war. Opposing an oppressive sexually aggressive male authority in the U.S. military is a very difficult task for women within the context of the contemporary milblogosphere that is dominated by patriarchal men. However, there are many problems with the gender politics these women milbloggers reinforce in their writing: often, they refer to themselves as 'females', address sexual assault in the military as a 'female' problem, and ostracize or "forget" about women who do not fit their traditional gender roles.

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