

Chapter 11

Would Elizabeth Cady Stanton Blog?

Women Bloggers, Politics, and Political Participation

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of women political bloggers and how they use their blogs for purposes related to politics, public policy, and current events. Based on a combined purposive-snowball sample, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 women political bloggers in October 2006. Findings show respondents blog about a range of topics, not necessarily unique to women. Generally, women use their blogs to inform their readers, check the media, engage in advocacy efforts, and solicit charitable contributions from their readers and more specifically, women ask their readers to vote and contact elected officials. Data show women deal with a range of challenges blogging most notably discrimination. Though a majority of women political bloggers reported they did not face discrimination, interviewees qualified their responses saying they witnessed discrimination and discriminatory attitudes, suggesting the political blogosphere is somewhat inhospitable to women.

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INTRODUCTION

In February 2007, the ascension and decline of two women political bloggers garnered national attention, when just days after being hired to blog for Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards they were forced to resign. Popular liberal bloggers, Amanda Marcotte of *Pandagon* (<http://www.pandagon.net/>, formerly <http://pandagon.blogspot.com/>) and Melissa McEwan of *Shakespeare's Sister* (<http://shakespearessister.blogspot.com/>) were hired by the Edwards campaign as Blogmaster and Netroots Coordinator respectively. In these capacities, the women were tasked with attracting liberal supporters, while building a blog audience on behalf of the campaign. On February 6, 2007, having blogged for only one week, Marcotte and McEwan were accused of writing anti-Catholic posts by the President of the Catholic League, Bill Donohue (Broder, 2007). While the Edwards campaign supported both bloggers, they resigned amidst a maelstrom of negative publicity (Marcotte, 2007). During her short tenure with the Edwards campaign, Marcotte simultaneously continued blogging at Pandagon. An explanation of her actions appeared in *Salon* (<http://www.salon.com/>) in which Marcotte wrote, "Reasonable people," I thought, "can tell the difference between a personal blog post and those I'll write for the campaign" (Marcotte, 2007). Yet this was not the case.

The above narrative illustrates the public fate of two popular feminist political bloggers. It underlines the scrutiny and challenges they faced while working for the Edwards campaign. Marcotte explains,

What I also failed to understand was how much McEwan and I would stick out. I was aware that I didn't exactly fit the image people have of bloggers who join campaigns—the stereotype being 30-something nerdy young white men who wear khakis and obsess over crafting their Act Blue lists. I wasn't aware that not fitting the image

would attract so much negative attention. In fact, I mostly saw this all as a baby step in the direction of diversity, since McEwan and I differed from the stereotype mostly by being female and by being outspoken feminists (Marcotte, 2007).

Whether or not the challenges these women faced are attributable to gender or their ideological position is debatable. This incident drew substantial attention in the mainstream media and the blogosphere; it only partially describes women political bloggers' experiences, however.

To date few studies examine the role of women bloggers within the realm of politics, public policy and current events. Filling the gaps in the literature, this research asks: what is unique about women political bloggers and how do women political bloggers use their blogs for purposes related to politics and participation? Based on in-depth interviews conducted in October 2006 with 20 women, this research attempts to identify the demographics of these bloggers, about which topics these women blog, and how they use their blogs in the context of politics. It also seeks to identify what challenges, if any, women political bloggers face, and whether they experience exclusion and discrimination in the blogosphere.

LITERATURE

Political Blogs

A growing body of work examines the rise of political bloggers, detailing how bloggers use this medium to participate in politics both online and/or in-person, and how bloggers use their blogs to mobilize readers. While a broad literature frames the research on blogging more generally, focusing on politics and participation this study draws upon descriptive and exploratory studies, and to a lesser degree theory building research.

Earlier works conducted by McKenna and Pole (2004, 2008) investigate the activities of A-list—

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