

# Facebook Feminism: Moderating Story and Visibility in Pantsuit Nation

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**Abstract:** *This essay examines the Pantsuit Nation Facebook group as one example of an emerging digital, feminist, rhetorical tradition. Drawing on recent research of political activism online, I analyze the implications of Pantsuit Nation's assertion that "storytelling is activism." In particular, I demonstrate how the Facebook group invites participants to engage in an ongoing, moderated construction of feminist identities and values through the use of shared narrative frames. Given the popularity of politicized social media groups like Pantsuit Nation, I assert that identity-based and story-based platforms such as Facebook are uniquely well-suited for inviting new participants into a feminist and political action, and afford members and moderators the ability to continuously revise and expand community narratives.*

**Keywords:** *Social media, storytelling, identity, intersectionality, politics*

"The relationship between storytelling and activism is nothing new. Stories are fuel. They are the why. Stories give meaning to action and meaningful action is the only way to drive long-term, sustainable change. . . . What Pantsuit Nation showed us in those first weeks and months after the election is that we are *all* storytellers. And so, we are all powerful."

*Libby Chamberlain, creator of the Pantsuit Nation Facebook group*

On November 8, 2016, I visited my local polling station to cast my vote for the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States. I wore a pantsuit. I posted on Facebook about my excitement to cast my ballot for the candidate I then assumed would be the first woman to become President of the United States. Throughout the day, I checked in to a private Facebook group, called Pantsuit Nation, where nearly three million members were also posting stories about their reasons for supporting Hillary Clinton and pictures of their own pantsuits worn in homage to Clinton's iconic wardrobe staple. On that day, I shared in the excitement and joy of the Pantsuit Nation community, and, in the weeks that followed, I

also shared in the grief, frustration, anxiety, and determination expressed by contributors in that space that was at once public and private, personal and political. Over the course of a year, as I read and reacted to posts, I began to think more critically about the way these rhetorical acts constructed and were constructed by this digital community, about how community members were defining the purpose and scope of feminist work, and about the significance of *Pantsuit Nation*<sup>1</sup> as feminist discourse.

Libby Chamberlain, creator of the *Pantsuit Nation* Facebook group and editor of a published collection of stories by the same name, contends that “storytelling is activism.” For this reason, I chose to begin with my own story. In doing so, I seek to reciprocate the intentions and candor of the contributors to *Pantsuit Nation*. I also wish to provide context for how I am situated as both a member of *Pantsuit Nation* and as a researcher. I joined the Facebook group in early November 2016 out of personal interest and have read and reacted<sup>2</sup> to the content posted there as a like-minded member of that community. As a researcher, beginning formally in February 2017, I collected and catalogued posts. Recognizing that I am inextricably enmeshed within the community and discourse I am examining, I also seek to echo the approach taken by Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, Wendy Sharer in *Vote and Voice: Women’s Organizations and Political Literacy, 1915-1930*, Carol Mattingly in *Well-Tempered Women: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric*, and Joann Campbell in “Afterword: Revealing the Ties That Bind.” Asserting that “stories matter,” Royster and Kirsch make clear that they “claim and celebrate feminist rhetorical studies as a professional identity while underscoring . . . how important it is – as professionals in this field – to critique this work and to fashion and sustain a strong sense of professional accountability” (3, 4). Throughout my research and writing about *Pantsuit Nation*, I have sought to emulate the practice Royster and Kirsch lay out: to recognize and interrogate my own connection to the subjects I analyze, and to examine and critique this feminist rhetorical space in a systematic, ethical way.

The discussion that follows, then, is a critical, rhetorical, and at times emotional engagement between a feminist researcher and a digital feminist community of which she was a part. This community, moreover, is one that both

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1 Here, and throughout, the *Pantsuit Nation* Facebook group will appear unitalicized, while I do italicize the title of the *Pantsuit Nation* book.

2 Facebook distinguishes between two forms of response for a post: commenting and reacting. Reacting refers to contributing a “like,” “love,” etc. but does not involve written commentary. I have reacted, but not commented, on posts in Facebook Nation.

agrees with and exemplifies the meaning of Royster and Kirsch's contention that "stories matter" (3). The discourse visible in *Pantsuit Nation* demonstrates the role digital platforms serve in allowing participants to use storytelling to gain visibility for themselves and the issues important to them, to articulate their own arguments for the purpose of feminist and political activity, and to interact with a community engaged in the process of identifying feminist issues. Through a series of narrative options, *Pantsuit Nation* gives participants the chance to engage in feminism as a personal and collective process; the digital group is a low-stakes and high-feedback place to share experiences and interact with others also engaged in the process of articulating a feminist identity and of learning about the issues important to the feminist work members might engage in offline. In particular, the storytelling in *Pantsuit Nation* allows members and moderators to increase the visibility of specific feminist issues, aiding participants in constructing personalized arguments for the purpose of feminist work, and helping members learn about offline activist activities. Moreover, as one example of an increasing number of political social media groups, *Pantsuit Nation* offers insight into the limitations and affordances of private social media communities as feminist and political organizations, especially their ability to successfully include a diverse range of voices and to serve as foundations for offline social and political change.

## **Social Media and Digital Feminist Rhetoric**

Feminist rhetorical research has increasingly investigated digital spaces and modes of discourse, rethinking how digital tools and sites are reshaping what it means to do feminist work. Andrea Lunsford (1999), Amy Koerber (2000), Jessica Enoch and Jean Bessette (2013), Royster and Kirsch (2012), and other scholars, for instance, have considered the implications of digital tools and sites for feminist, rhetorical, and historical research methods. Likewise, Buck (2012), Black (2006), and Grasmuck, Martin, and Zhao (2009) investigate specific sites of discourse online, engaging questions of access and identity. More particularly, Jacqueline Rhodes (2002), Mary Queen (2008), and Gail E. Hawisher and Patricia Sullivan (1998) trace how the "fixity and fluidity" of online spaces shapes the construction, circulation, and implications of feminist activity there where meaning is "made, changed, and transformed in the movement, rather than the stasis, of texts" (Rhodes, 118; Queen, 475). Communication research and media studies have also examined feminist activity online, with scholars such as Ryan Bowles Eagle (2015), Carrie Rentschler (2015), Sherri Williams (2016), and Stacey K. Sowards and Valerie R. Reneger (2006) highlighting feminist, activist rhetoric and community building on Twitter and other social media spaces.

A theme in these recent examinations of feminist activity in online social groups has been how writers have used public venues like Twitter, private listserv, and social media groups to circulate protests, find like-minded people, and even gain visibility and voice in a space that seems safer and more accessible than physical spaces of protest. Both Williams and Eagle, for example, investigate how women's activity on Twitter allows contributors to gain visibility while still offering a sense of (physical) safety. Emboldened by the disconnect between the digital and the physical, women, especially those under-represented or mis-represented by other media outlets, can gain visibility. Williams in particular contends that social media platforms can be vital spaces for raising awareness of violence against black women "because [they enable] anti-violence advocates to connect with the public and one another in real time without relying on the traditional news cycle or the mainstream media's problematic framing of sexual violence and black women" (342). In *Digital Sisterhood: A Memoir of Fierce Living Online*, Ananda Kiamish Madelyn Leeke likewise attests to the value of online spaces such as blog communities that allow women, especially women of color, to connect, collaborate and build communities of support.

As Eagle, Williams, and Leeke describe, the Pantsuit Nation Facebook group is a virtual space that simultaneously affords public visibility and physical safety for women while they discuss and circulate a range of intersectional feminist issues. As a by-invitation-only community, moreover, Pantsuit Nation is part of a trend of private social media groups that are created around a community that shares social or political goals. Other large-scale, private Facebook groups include FIN (originally Female in Nigeria, now Female IN) created by Lola Omolola in 2015, the Isreali Supergirls group started by Maria Green Povarchik and Reut Reuveni in 2015, and the Binders Full of Women Writers group, and network of sub-groups, which first appeared in 2014. These Facebook groups function as restricted online communities where women can discuss issues and explore feminist identities while controlling the boundaries of participation and circulation. As both Libby Chamberlain and Lola Omolola describe in their respective explanations for why they created Pantsuit Nation and Female IN, private social media groups allow contributors to give voice to ideas and experiences they were afraid to share in more public venues like Twitter. In an interview with Maxine Williams, the Global Chief Diversity Officer for Facebook, Omolola asserts that groups like Female IN "provide a supportive community where women can speak and be our best selves, and feel like we can be honest and not be judged." As digital platforms that are easy for many individuals to access and allow for the growth of a large, geographically dispersed community, social media groups like Pantsuit Nation offer the promise of easily achieved diversity. At the same time, their private nature

and restricted membership process can, and has, resulted in the creation of problematically homogenous groups, where it is difficult for members or moderators to develop truly intersectional paradigms of feminism. The shifting name of FIN demonstrates Omolola's response to this challenge, as she worked to change the digital groups' identity from centering around women's experiences in Nigeria only (Females in Nigeria) to embrace more women's experiences globally (Female IN). The storytelling most visible, and most valued, on Pantsuit Nation likewise offers an illustration of how members and moderators must negotiate the broad options for entry afforded by digital sites in order to cultivate more intentional inclusion.

At the same time, private social media groups do valuably offer members the chance to observe and participate in the process of constructing and defining a feminist community. In "Redoing Feminism: Digital Activism, Body Politics, and Neoliberalism," Hester Baer examines #yesallwomen and ultimately argues that social media sites supports "process-based political actions" that "emphasize the process of searching for new political paradigms, languages, and symbols" instead of traditional forms of offline activism (30). Baer speaks to the value of individuals "searching" for language and identities through their contributions and interactions on public online sites. Members of private Facebook groups engage in similar "process-based political actions," but also contribute to the construction, definition, and policing of a set of community values for feminist work. In doing so, I would argue that groups like Pantsuit Nation prompt active participants to work through new, personalized paradigms of feminism in a virtual safe space. Chamberlain, in her contention that the storytelling in Pantsuit Nation can act as "fuel" for offline activism, and Omolola, in her similar contention that discussions on FIN are the "foundation" for "disrupt[ing] the status quo," point to the valuable role private groups can play in bringing like-minded individuals together, offering safe visibility, and moderating the discussion of feminist issues, identities, and activities. In essence, private social media groups provide members a low-stakes way to engage in feminism as a process of personal and social discovery.

This in-process feminist work is enabled in part through the particular way that discourse circulates and generates feedback in social media communities. The continuously interactive nature of all rhetorical acts on social media makes this discourse different from the print and oral texts scholars have traditionally studied. In "Transnational Feminist Rhetorics in a Digital World," Mary Queen traces the circulation of an Afghan women's rights organization, arguing that rhetorical acts online, particularly those on social media sites are not static. Rather, they evolve as they circulate and as others interact. This is visible on private sites such as Pantsuit Nation, where members may return to a post months after the original posting to react or comment, and contributors

may in turn edit or add to their post in response to these comments and reactions. It is this circulation and interaction that affords participants the chance to negotiate meaning, validate or invalidate certain language or stories, and situate personal stories as part of a collective social and political cause.

Moreover, for Queen, the reality of this continuous circulation and reinterpretation requires researchers to rethink their methodologies. She advises and enacts what she terms a “rhetorical genealogical” approach. Rhetorical genealogy is “a process of examining digital texts not as artifacts of rhetorical productions, but, rather, as continually evolving rhetorical actions that are materially bound, actions whose transformation can be traced through the links embedded within multiple fields of circulation” (476). That is, researchers must emphasize actions rather than products, understanding that the objects studied in online spaces are at once the result of an originating rhetorical act, and are still in the process of acting in digital circulation. It is important to note that Pantsuit Nation, and other Facebook groups, are not absent of a hierarchy or systems of power. Contributors create posts, but these posts must first be approved by a group administrator. Then, members of the community attach new meaning, and potentially validity and power, through their responses to it – responses that either boost a post repeatedly into primary viewing on the page, or cause the post to sink into the partial obscurity created by the sheer volume of contributions. In my exploration of Pantsuit Nation, then, I am, as Queen suggests, not only concerned with the original text of a contributor, but also with the life of that text after the original posting: the reactions it generated and how long the post continued to receive reactions, and the nature of the comments and their interpretation of the meaning of the post. I am also interested in the role moderators play in influencing the type of posts that will be validated by the community at large.

This examination of Pantsuit Nation is the result of a year-long exploration of both the private and public Facebook groups and the edited collection by the same name.<sup>3</sup> The private Facebook group was created by Libby Chamberlain on October 20, 2016 with the description: “Wear a pantsuit on November 8 – you know why.” The group was, and is, private: new members must be invited by someone else who is already a member and posts in the group would not be seen in any non-member Facebook feeds. Between October 20<sup>th</sup> and November 8<sup>th</sup> 2016, the group grew to three million members. Before and on election day, members posted about their support for Clinton. After the election, the group shared emotional responses to the results and discussed

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3 Because the majority of the activity on Pantsuit Nation took place in a private group, all of the texts I quote below will come from the *Pantsuit Nation* book or public Facebook group.

actions to take in response. In early 2017, Chamberlain set up a more formal Pantsuit Nation organization with charitable outlets and began compiling an edited collection from contributors who agreed to have their posts published, thus creating a public face to the private Facebook group.

As a particularly large and well-known private Facebook community, Pantsuit Nation offers important insights into new forms of feminist work in digital spaces. Rooted in Chamberlain's assertion that "storytelling is activism," Pantsuit Nation, like Female IN and other groups, demonstrates how digital feminists use social media posts to engage in critical storytelling, storytelling that both allows individual participants to articulate their sense of a feminist identity and purpose, and inspires the community as a whole to circulate the ideas and experiences that will define the Pantsuit Nation brand of feminism. Scholars such as Aja Martinez, William Broussard, Victor Villanueva, Malea Powell, and Anh Hua have explored the power of storytelling, and the use of counterstory, to disrupt and broaden cultural narratives and to prompt social change. Tracing the use of narrative by Black diaspora women writers, Hua asserts that "by writing one's self into history and narrative using autobiographical stories . . . one can achieve narrative empowerment" (37). The members of Pantsuit Nation rely on the empowering, disruptive, and community-building possibilities of narrative and the affordances of a private, digital space to increase visibility for issues facing women, to support arguments for the purpose of feminist activity, and to help members learn how to engage in politics and activism offline. The types of stories privileged by the group, particularly narratives of self-identity, motherhood, history, or civic activity, provide insight into how individuals are using virtual spaces to connect personal stories to collective feminist ideologies and causes. Members' and moderators' interactions with these narratives, moreover, reveal how the digital community struggled to cultivate a diverse representation of women's experiences and to emphasize the ability of storytelling to act as a foundation for offline activist work.

## **Telling Their Stories**

Few are unfamiliar with the primary content of Facebook: posts articulating the writer's sense of self and often idealistic, boastful representations of life experience. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the primary rhetorical work of Pantsuit Nation reflects this trend, emphasizing the creation of short biographies in which contributors introduce themselves to the Pantsuit Nation community and, in word and in image, display how they identify themselves as feminists. Possibly inspired by the original posts of the group before and on election day, in which many members introduced themselves to the community by posting pictures in pantsuits with statements about why they supported Hillary Clinton, many of the posts in Pantsuit Nation feature contributors

introducing themselves to other members with a short story about their life experiences and personality that they then connect to their social, political, and feminist values. Regan, for instance, one of the early contributors in the private group and a subsequent contributor to *Pantsuit Nation*, submits a picture of herself at a Pride parade and narrates her process of self-discovery: "I'm an optimistic person and I smile often, but do you see that smile? That smile is different. It's one of hard-won self-acceptance and paralyzing truthfulness and, eventually, openness. I've had to fight hard for that smile, and some days I still have to go looking for it" (Chamberlain 1). Regan, then, like many other contributors, connects this personal history and sense of identity to her activist purpose: "I want [my nephew] and my future kids and your kids and your brother's ex-girlfriend's cousin's kids to grow up in a world where they know that feelings don't fit properly in closets . . . . I don't want their brightest smiles to be so fought for. And that's why I'm with her" (Chamberlain 1). Participants responded to this post, as they did with so many other similar posts, by offering words of support, praise, and solidarity.

It is common, on both the private and public sides of *Pantsuit Nation*, to encounter posts like Regan's; posts in which the contributor tells a story about themselves that they suggest or assert defines their identity as a person, and as a feminist. At times, contributors will comment on *Pantsuit Nation* being a "safe space to tell your story," as a November 2016 contributor does, or will explicitly state "here is my story." "I am" statements are common, as contributors make connections between their history or experience to construct a story about who they are. In this practice, contributors echo the mission outlined by Libby Chamberlain and other group moderators in their calls for members to embrace the power of sharing their personal stories. This practice is also in keeping with the purpose Omolola describes for Female IN, where she makes clear that the goal for that community, and value of private groups in general, is to give women a space "where they feel like they can say 'here I am' and they can stand in their truth" ("Community Voices"). It is equally clear, in telling "their story" and articulating their sense of identity, that contributors seek to give voice and visibility to the values and issues they believe are, or should be, important to the feminist community. Regan, quoted above, does this clearly in presenting her narrative of "hard-won self-acceptance" for her sexuality and connected desire to see other young people "grow up in a world where they know that feelings don't fit properly in closets" (Chamberlain 1). Here too, Regan is not alone. Contributors repeatedly offer stories of their experience as an immigrant or as the daughter of an immigrant, of their encounters with discrimination, or of their successes as a religious or racial minority in a traditionally white, male-dominated sector.



In this way, contributors take advantage of both the safety and size of the digital community to use storytelling as a means of increasing awareness of important issues and to revise and address cultural narratives about their racial, ethnic, religious, or sexual identity. Many writers, scholars, and activists have used storytelling as way to give voice to experiences that have been repressed and to rewrite dominant cultural narratives. In their scholarly work, Malea Powell and Victor Villanueva both model and argue for the significance of narrative, with Villanueva in particular asserting that “the narrative of the person of color validates. It resonates. It awakens, particularly for those of us who are in institutions where our numbers are few” (15). Anh Hua in “Black Diaspora Feminism and Writing: Memory, Storytelling, and the Narrative World as Sites of Resistance” and Aja Y. Martinez in “A Plea for Critical Race Theory Counterstory: Stock Story versus Couterstory Dialogues Concerning Alejandra’s ‘Fit’ in the Academy” articulate the role narrative, particularly counterstory, plays in inspiring and sustaining resistance. Martinez explains that counterstory “is a method of telling stories by people whose experiences are not often told. Counterstory as methodology thus serves to expose, analyze, and challenge stock stories of racial privilege and can help to strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance” (38). Many storytellers in *Pantsuit Nation* take advantage of the opportunity afforded by the digital community’s mission of “storytelling is activism” to relate narratives about themselves that “expose, analyze, and challenge stock stories of racial privilege,” or, perhaps even more frequently, that expose and challenge cultural narratives about Muslims, immigrants, or LGBT persons (Martinez 38). Further, while Martinez, Hua, and others highlight the value of narrative and counterstory in traditional print mediums, Facebook groups like *Pantsuit Nation* offer storytellers the additional ability to receive immediate and ongoing feedback on their narratives, and to respond back on a personal level to individual commenters. Such feedback and response can be incredibly positive, as other community members support and affirm the contributor as a person, articulate the effect the story had on them as readers, and even validate and extend the story with declarations of similar experiences and identities. Indeed, moderator rules in *Pantsuit Nation*, *Female IN*, and other groups stress that kind, supportive, and respectful responses to contributor stories are the only kind of commenting that will be tolerated. Such rules protect the digital community as a safe space for sharing counterstories and for giving voice to feminist identities. It is equally true that such rules cut off the growth of critical discussions about members’ stories, discussions that might help problematize the privileges enjoyed by some contributors. Thus, by design, the storytelling in protected, digital spaces like *Pantsuit Nation* limit the potentially valuable interaction members might have engaged in if they could

have critiqued and disagreed more, even as the platform fosters the cultivation and circulation diverse narratives that can build an intersectional feminist community.

The interplay between the limitations and possibilities of a private social media group further plays out in the way that Pantsuit Nation members use pictures to construct their stories and to serve as visual displays of a feminist identity. As noted previously, the concept of visibility is important in the Facebook group; numerous posts featuring the kind of identity-based stories I consider here also include such statements as “this is what a veteran looks like” or “this is what the daughter of a refugee looks like,” or declare, as one contributor did in June 2017, that “we all want to be seen.” Encouraged, then, both by the group name and the image-heavy content of Facebook itself, contributors seeking to tell their story continuously use pictures of themselves and others displaying or, more specifically, wearing their sense of identity and feminist values. In her book, Chamberlain claims that “the pantsuit symbolized this moment in history, and I wanted to wear that symbol – to embrace it and embody it and celebrate it” (xi). Chamberlain cites, as do others in the group, the repeated references made to and critiques of Clinton’s appearance throughout the presidential campaign, and to a broader cultural preoccupation with what women wear. Some contributors, then, draw deliberate and thoughtful connections between what they are wearing, the identity they embody, and their sense of purpose in political and social action. Importantly, group members also quickly adopted the pantsuit as a symbolic garment that could be represented by a variety of clothing types. Mical, for example, introduces herself to the community picture of herself in military uniform and a story that explains:

the best pantsuit I ever wore was green, adorned with accomplishments, and finished off with classic jump boots. I was part of the first gender-integrated Basic Training cycle . . . I am also one of the few women that managed to graduate Jump School and stay active in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division . . . Every time I heard, ‘No . . . you’re just a girl.’ I said, ‘Watch me.’ (Chamberlain 6).

Like many others, Mical acknowledges that the symbolic power Chamberlain ascribes to the pantsuit can be represented in a variety of clothing types. Other contributors to the book, such as Afsheen who declares “I am a Muslim physician, wearing hijab” (Chamberlain 8), and thousands of group contributors who submitted pictures of their vastly varying versions of “the pantsuit,” including doctors’ scrubs, uniforms, feminist slogan t-shirts, and even protective jumpsuits for welding, link their feminist identity with the clothing there are wearing, treating a variety of different articles of clothing as the symbolic,

powerful pantsuit Chamberlain invokes. As with the open and inclusive call made by group moderators for members to tell their story, the trend toward literal visibility on Pantsuit Nation created a space for increased, visible diversity, as members could – and many did – use their appearance and their picture to highlight the ways their feminist experience intersected with race, religion, or gender identity.

In *Appropriate[ing] Dress: Women's Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America*, Carol Mattingly examines how women rhetors used dress to fashion their public ethos, noting that “women made dress speak for them. Clothing not only allowed them a way to construct the image they would project. It also represented a manner of expression or supplement to voice for a group restricted and discouraged from expressing itself publicly” (7-8). For the nineteenth-century women Mattingly investigates, certain forms of dress, such as the mid-century “Bloomer” outfit, helped them to establish and justify a public, rather than domestic, space for female rhetors (47). The sociopolitical context Pantsuit Nation members face is quite different from and considerably more open to women’s public and political presence than nineteenth-century America. Nonetheless, the members of Pantsuit Nation demonstrate a similar belief in the ability of dress to establish an identity for themselves as individuals and as members of a feminist collective, at times “as an expression or substitute to voice” (8). The use of the pantsuit as a means of not just wearing but embodying a political statement is, in many ways, a remarkably safe strategy; although once a symbol of women’s movement into the professional sector, the pantsuit is by now ubiquitous, though not trendy. Yet, in a society where women are repeatedly told that fashion is a medium of self-expression and self-presentation, the pantsuit symbol does allow women an easy-access, low-risk way to make a visual, rhetorical statement about themselves and their values. Moreover, the fact that contributors quickly re-defined the “pantsuit” as a variety of different types of outfits that correlated to jobs or religious or lifestyle affiliations speaks to the fact that the women of Pantsuit Nation saw an implied symbol behind the pantsuit Chamberlain invoked: clothing that in some way “voiced” public, professional, social, or political values. A pantsuit could be personalized – like all of the politics in the group – and still allow the wearer to display a political persona and to tell a story.

Some contributors articulate meaningful connections between the images they include in their posts, including the pantsuit they wear, and their own sense of clothing as a rhetorical and political tool. One election-day contributor, for instance, posts a picture of herself in a pantsuit, noting that although she is afraid to start a conversation about politics, she feels stronger wearing the pantsuit that so many other community members are wearing as well. A June contributor echoes this post, outlining her journey into a career in politics

and declaring that she feels as though, in wearing a pantsuit, she is both representing and taking the Pantsuit Nation community with her to work. Both posts generated a great deal of response: two thousand people reacted to the June post and provided comments of support and excitement. Indeed, the continuing popularity of this post type suggests how much contributors wanted to see themselves, and more importantly for others to see them, as feminists, as activists.

It is important to note, however, that while many contributors used the image of the pantsuit, in whatever form, to make such clear connections between their story and feminist identity, some contributors also use the image as a replacement for personal narrative and omit any critical consideration of the relationship between their appearance and a sociopolitical ethos. The activity within Pantsuit Nation is extensive, and some of its features very simple posts that consist of little more than a picture of a member wearing a pantsuit or carrying a protest sign or donning a voting sticker. The Facebook platform and the pantsuit story thus provide members with an easy and uncritical way to enter the community, but do not necessarily demand a great deal of engagement on their part. It is only through the interaction of other members and the work of moderators, who boost posts like the two described above by commenting on them and advertising them on the public page, that the group establishes a preference for more developed stories and picture posts. Likewise, the broad invitation for members to introduce themselves to the community through a story, whether textual or image-based, opens the door to the critical inclusion of a diverse range of visual and textual stories that could help all members better understand what an intersectional, digital feminism might look like. Again, however, the sheer size of the group enabled by the digital platform and the fact that the moderators intentionally set guidelines for participation that are broad, inclusive, and supportive-by-necessity, means that it is just as easy for Pantsuit Nation members to be uncritical in their contributions and interactions. Much as Cynthia L. Selfe articulates in her explorations of how digital tools shape and reshape composition studies, what private social media groups like Pantsuit Nation most clearly present to contemporary feminist movements is a system of affordances that participants may or may not use.

## **Telling Stories that Empower: Motherhood and History**

Importantly, one of the possibilities that digital spaces like private Facebook groups afford their participants are multiple options for entry. So, while many participants take advantage of Pantsuit Nation's call for storytelling

as activism to articulate a story about who they are and correspondingly why they espouse certain social and political ideals, other contributions to the group include narratives accounts of motherhood and the writer's family history. Participants not only use these histories and motherhood stories to explain their individual feminist and political values, but also to validate and justify an implicit argument that a specific goal or goals should be important to all women.

In invoking motherhood as the foundation for an argument about political and feminist activity, many contributors set up a problematic assumption that the majority of Pantsuit Nation members will identify with mothering experiences. Nonetheless, motherhood themes and references work their way into a vast array of contributions to Pantsuit Nation, where contributors reframe their identity as mothers as a core component of their identity as feminists and activists. In this, the contributors to Pantsuit Nation are returning to an old practice, visible, for example, in rhetorical constructions of a Republican motherhood in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and in articulations of the "cult of domesticity" in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Broadly speaking, both paradigms reinforced conservative beliefs about the importance of a domestic sphere for women, while simultaneously suggesting that, in protecting families and especially children, women had a stake in the outcome political and social movements. Lindal Buchanan, in *Rhetorics of Motherhood* and Evelyn Nakano Glenn, in "Social Constructions of Mothering: A Thematic Overview," interrogate historical models of motherhood, delineating it as a cultural construction with deep symbolic power that always serves to relegate the (lower) status of women within a patriarchal society. Nonetheless, Buchanan makes clear that appeals to a common motherhood have also been effectively used to build community and support by "encourage[ing] identification and [inspiring] a predetermined emotional response" (6). Likewise, in describing the ways women of the Women's Christian Temperance Union redeployed conventional ideals of womanhood in order to make their arguments and activities compelling for a wide audience, Carol Mattingly notes that "WCTU women also deftly made use of women's prescribed role both to establish their authority and to challenge traditional limits for women, thereby refashioning an image of women that better satisfied their own needs and wishes" (*Well-Tempered* 40). In this way, ideals of motherhood have been constructed and manipulated by women's groups in the past to establish common ground and lend authority to their mission.

The contributors of Pantsuit Nation make use of a similar strategy, framing their own narratives of motherhood to support and validate own social and political values, and to argue that other members of the community should espouse the same goals. One contributor to the private group and to

the book, Anna Allen, submits a picture of her four daughters and asserts that “I’m with her because I want them to always know that they are the ones who are able to make their own decisions about their bodies. . . . I’m with her because I want them to always be kind and respectful and loving of all people regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, and everything in between” (Chamberlain 59). The emotional response the post creator no doubt hoped for was achieved in a volley of comments of support and praise for the children. It is equally clear, however, that Allen’s strategy of writing as a mother has allowed her to safely, even altruistically, articulate her own political and social values, values she would like to insist should be learned and adopted by the country at large. By rhetorically structuring a political assertion as the hopes or fears of a mother, contributors like Allen protect their claims from any real dissent. At the same time, however, in claiming political agency as part of a motherly ethos, these contributors suggest or imply discomfort in claiming those rights for themselves. Talamieka N. Charles Brice, for instance, a frequent and prominent contributor to the group, to the book, and even to the *Pantsuit Nation* podcast, asserts in one post, featuring a picture of her holding her young son, that she will “fight like hell” for her son and exhorts readers that “if you care about our country, our future, you will do the same,” effectively calling on other women in the community to build on their identity as mothers to also become activists (Chamberlain 242). It is important to note, as well, that for many participants, motherhood narratives like Brice’s are compelling and effective; Brice’s post quoted here elicited 39 thousand reactions and nearly five thousand comments.

While Buchanan’s examination of the rhetoric of motherhood prompts her to contend, correctly, that motherhood is often “coded in ways that disregard intersectional differences [and] create institutional impediments for non-traditional women,” some writers, like Brice, actually use descriptions of their experiences as mothers as a means of representing complex racial, sexual, cultural, and bodily identities (21). Brice, for instance, whose post was quoted above, crafts a purpose for her text that is rooted in her identity as the mother of a son who will be “in the blink of an eye . . . a black man” (Chamberlain 242). She uses the frame of her concern as a mother to reflect on her awareness of, and teach community members about, the cultural narratives surrounding black manhood: “born into a narrative he did not create” (Chamberlain 242). Comments on her post reflect the community’s recognition of the value of her reflection, with some commenters suggesting that all community members need to read the post. Moderators further promoted Brice’s story by adding their own supportive comments, and then inviting her to join them on the public *Pantsuit Nation* podcast and contribute to the book. In this way, Chamberlain and other moderators use their influence to encourage the *Pantsuit Nation*

community to use narratives of motherhood to incite and extend discussion of intersectional issues. Brice, moreover, was not the only contributor to use their story of motherhood to raise awareness for other important issues that women face. Numerous contributors describe their concern for their children's encounters with normative gender identities or challenges in seeking citizenship, while other contributors describe their experience in parenting with a same-sex or transgender partner. Motherhood and parenthood, in these posts, becomes the vehicle through which a diverse range of writers can claim a shared identity, emotional life, and sociopolitical mission with the other members of *Pantsuit Nation*, while at the same time highlighting issues of difference. Stories like Brice's function to make visible the reality that Patricia Hill Collins describes in her exploration in "Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing About Motherhood" where she makes clear that "motherhood occurs in specific historical situations framed by interlocking structures of race, class, and gender, . . . racial domination and economic exploitation profoundly shape the mothering context, not only for racial ethnic women in the United States, but for all women" (45).

The moderators of *Pantsuit Nation* are eager to promote and celebrate discussion of the "interlocking structures of race, class, and gender" in members' experiences of motherhood. Yet, it is equally clear that the use of motherhood stories in *Pantsuit Nation* is problematic: because these stories often reinforce simplistic gender binaries and heteronormative expectations, and because, as with the identity-based stories described in the previous section, the mandate to demonstrate only kindness and support in commenting practices discourages critical discussions of how privilege and context shape mothering experiences. Glenn, Buchanan, Collins, and Linda Kerber all examine how ideals of motherhood operate on problematic binaries that disadvantage women. Kerber, reflecting on the influence of theories of Republican motherhood, contends that part of what limits such perspectives is that "women could claim political participation only so long as they kept their politics in the service of the men in their family, using it to ensure republican authenticity on the part of their husbands and their sons" (25). While the stories in *Pantsuit Nation* obviously extend that service to include daughters, contributors like Allen and Brice do situate the purpose of their activist work as residing almost exclusively in the welfare of their children. Moreover, in centering the emotional appeal of their posts and the goals of the feminist community on the needs and wellbeing of children, many of these contributors demonstrate an assumption that, in speaking to a feminist community, they are necessarily speaking to a community of mothers. In this way, the popularity of the motherhood experience as a narrative frame and the relative absence of posts that might act as counterstories deemphasizing the primacy of motherhood as

the foundation of a feminist mission serves to implicitly reinforce what Lee Edelman has described as a heteronormative, “compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism” (21). For Edelman, such “compulsory narratives” are situated as impossible to argue against and, as is visible in the Pantsuit Nation posts quoted previously, privilege the imagining of the rights of future generations over the freedoms of current (adult) persons.

Moreover, while the book and the official Pantsuit Nation page are filled with mother-stories representing racial, religious, and sexual diversity, many contributions to the private group do not list considerations of racial discrimination or fears for immigration status. More importantly, since the guidelines for interaction in the group discourage members for critiquing one another, posts featuring motherhood stories that offer an uncritical reflection of white, heteronormative privilege do not inspire any kind of discussion highlighting this privilege or pointing out how such narratives might contrast with the counterstories provided by contributors like Brice. Collins argues that “survival, power and identity shape motherhood for all women. But these themes remain muted when the mothering experiences of women of color are marginalized,” and subsequently argues that re-centering our focus on the experiences of minority mothers serves to broaden and deepen our understanding of motherhood as a whole (61). While Pantsuit Nation does not marginalize the mothering experiences of women of color, the functioning of the digital platform, which deemphasizes tension and makes the intentional organization of posts impossible – since posts appear first in order of submission and then shuffle in prominence based on the reactions of community members – means that complex, critical considerations of motherhood and feminist purpose are not always centered in the content of the group.

At times interlinked to the conception of political motherhood insofar as contributors reflect on their own mothers and grandmothers, the articulation of a familial history is another common narrative frame used by members of Pantsuit Nation to claim authority and purpose. From the very first days of the private group, Pantsuit Nation writers presented stories and images of family members who had inspired them to take political action or who had “paved the way” for the possibilities now available to them as women. In the introduction to her edited collection, Chamberlain draws attention to a small selection of posts (including a couple mother-oriented ones), but the first three posts she describes as excellent exemplars of storytelling are histories of women who struggled with, and at times defied, cultural expectations for women. Chamberlain particularly mentions reading about “Hank,” the grandmother of an early contributor, Susan. Susan’s post features a picture of her grandmother, Henrietta, in a stewardess uniform in front of a TWA plane. She describes Henrietta’s journey into medical school in the 1930’s and, ultimately,



her life as a mother and science teacher, but reflects, more importantly, on her own understanding of Henrietta's experience: "For a long time, it was hard for me to understand why she quit and got married – quitting wasn't her style. Then one day I read the scrapbook she kept from her time at med school, including the news articles and letters. It floored me. Blatant sexism oozes from every word. I started to understand the overwhelming forces she was pushing against" (Chamberlain 33). Susan then describes her vote for Hillary Clinton as being in dedication for "my single mother who had a career on Capitol Hill and fought for universal healthcare, and for my Grandma Retta. She would have made one heck of a doctor" (Chamberlain 33). Frequently alongside black-and-white pictures, posts like Susan's craft a history of women's experience, telling stories of women who struggled against systemic sexism, who died from unsafe abortions, who immigrated to a new country, or who wanted to vote or attend law school. Writers craft these stories to serve as an argument for the relevance of a particular cause for women in the digital community and feminists in general, whether it be the importance of reproductive rights or the necessity of immigration reform.

Of all the strategies employed by the participants in *Pantsuit Nation*, telling of a family history seems the least bound up in negative and contradictory implications, as is the case with contributors' use of motherhood. Many posts consist almost entirely of the story of a female relative, and conclude with a declaration that "I'm with her because of them" (Chamberlain 13). The stories contributors weave illustrate their dawning understanding of the challenges these women faced in an unjust society and, correspondingly, contributors' desire to take advantage of the opportunities denied to their predecessors and to ensure that future women have equal or more freedom. Lauren, for example, introduces her grandmother, Elizabeth Cavanaugh, who "wanted to go to be a lawyer, but was sent to secretarial school" (Chamberlain 13). She describes her grandmother's pride when she herself graduated from law school, "watching her granddaughter have the opportunity she never had," and then, like many other contributors, Lauren asserts that in "voting in a pantsuit on November 8 in memory of my grandma" she is both honoring the disadvantages her grandmother faced and ensuring a more gender equal society in future (Chamberlain 13). Deborah Leoci, likewise, includes a picture of her grandmother as a young woman and recounts that she "never got to meet [her] because she died after having an abortion during the Depression" and then declares that "I'm with her because I do not want to go back to the Dark Ages. I voted in her memory. Let's go forward and continue to support and love one another because we're better together!" (Chamberlain 64). Invoking one of Clinton's campaign slogans, Leoci condemns the lack of reproductive choices faced by her grandmother and calls on other members of *Pantsuit*

Nation to “go forward,” presumably to work to ensure greater reproductive freedom for women. Importantly, the narratives Leoci, Lauren, and Susan construct, do not call for political or feminist action in the name of their children, but rather use the challenges faced by their grandmothers to argue for the necessity of an equal and just society for themselves and other members of the Pantsuit Nation community.

As a member and researcher of Pantsuit Nation, these family histories were also my favorite narrative, perhaps because these posts offered visual and narrative evidence of a community outside the boundaries of the Facebook group. Ideals of motherhood are powerful, if limiting, but the writing of a history and the creation of a legacy has a legitimizing power too. And, of course, part of the power of this particular rhetorical strategy is that it provides contributors the autonomy and authority to craft that historical reflection in a way that serves their present goals. One December 2017 contributor to the private group, for example, shared a reflection on her grandmother who was a Democrat and civil rights advocate. Admitting that it is difficult for her to imagine the realities of her grandmother’s life, as a Jewish woman in turn-of-the-century Alabama, the writer nevertheless asserts that she is certain her grandmother would be proud of her, would have voted for a recent state Democratic candidate, and joined the writer and her family at the Women’s March. Many other writers make use of a similar strategy: simultaneously uncovering and celebrating an ancestor or older family member, and then using that sense of history to support and justify the writer’s current political endeavors. Here, the writers of Pantsuit Nation recreate a history of women’s experiences for their digital community, an act that, like wearing a pantsuit and establishing their authority as mothers, makes them feel powerful.

## **Storytelling and Activism**

Beginning with the Women’s March in January 2017, a new narrative emerged on Pantsuit Nation: stories of a participant’s recent civic or political activity. During the weekend of the Women’s March (January 21), in particular, it became obvious that many members of Pantsuit Nation were also participants in the Women’s March group as well. In presenting and describing their political activity offline, participants used these stories about political activity as a means of making specific political and social stances visible to the community, much as they did with the other narrative frames dominant in the group. In addition, however, numerous contributors sought use their story of political or social action to inspire other community members to act, and to educate them in how to do so. In this way, Pantsuit Nation participants address one of the primary critiques of political groups on social media: that they

replace traditional, offline action with ineffective discussion among members who already agree with one another and share very similar experiences.

The nature of the activities described varies, but, most frequently, posts in the private group about political action center around the writer's first experience calling a state representative, voting for a certain candidate, or volunteering to help at the polls. Posts in the public group highlight community members who are running for office or organizing groups in their (offline) local communities. No matter the activity described, these posts emphasize the contributor's personal desire to make a difference in a specific way and offer strong encouragement for other members to act similarly. In a December 2017 post in the private group, for instance, one of many contributors shares her first experience calling a state representative. She offers a description of the phone call itself and reflects on her own emotional journey; first describing her anxiety about making the call and her wish to honor her grandmother's memory by overcoming this fear, the contributor ultimately asserts that the act made her feel powerful. This particular contributor is not alone; many posts in *Pantsuit Nation* offer similar narratives where the writer describes their anxiety in calling a representative for the first time and their sense of accomplishment afterwards. Comments on these posts commonly feature other members indicating that they too have begun calling representatives and, often, post threads feature members contributing information about how to make such calls and what to say. Similarly, many posts feature pictures of the contributors leaving a voting station, adorned with the requisite sticker, and describe the writers' sense of pride either in being a lone "blue dot" in a red state. It is common, likewise, on the private and public pages for contributors and moderators to circulate information about upcoming elections. At times, these posts present straightforward information, rather than a story. However, more commonly, contributors provide stories about why they are voting a particular way or why they decided to run for election.

Moderators often further promote these posts by adding them to the public page as well. In November 2017, for example, the public page featured a story by Aryanna Berringer. As other members had previously done, Berringer introduces herself to the community wearing a sweatshirt declaring "this is what a veteran looks like" and offers a description of her history: "I grew up poor with a dad who was black and mom who is white. I went to war. Got out, got a job and joined my union. I went to college." Berringer then describes her sense of purpose in running for office:

I think it's time we start electing people who understand what it means to be the very backbone of our economy. . . . By all accounts, given where I started in life, my family should be generations away from

ever running for office. But here I am. I am running for Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania because if we are ever going to change the hearts and minds of politicians who sit around the table making all the decisions, then it's time we had someone at the table who has firsthand experience at how those decisions can affect your life.

In this way, Berringer uses her story to make an argument to the community about the need for more diverse representation in the government. While the Pantsuit Nation group does not necessarily overlap with the population who could actually help elect Berringer, the social media group does give her a large community of support – on the private page, her post generated three thousand comments of support and of agreement with her argument – and a large platform to share her argument about the value of women's and minority leadership.

The connection between social media groups and subsequent offline activism and political activity is a relatively new subject of study. Research conducted by Thomas J Johnson, et al. (2011), Summer Harlow (2011), Bart Cammaerts (2011), Dana Rotman, et al. (2011), and Georgetown University's *Dynamics of Cause Engagement* research initiative has examined the extent to which political interaction on social media correlates or supports offline political activity. Johnson, et al., in particular, found that while political engagement on social media did not necessarily predict political activity, social media use did correlate to civic activity, such as volunteering for local organizations, and serve as a way for those already interested in political action to find and circulate information (187). Harlow, Rotman, et al., and the *Dynamics of Cause Engagement* study, however, suggest that there is a correlation, if not causation, between social media activity and offline political activity. Data from *Dynamics of Cause Engagement* reveal that, from a research population of 2,000 Americans over the age of eighteen, "social media promoters" are "twice as likely to volunteer their time (30% vs. 15%) and to take part in an event or walk (25% vs. 11%) [and] they are more than four times as likely to encourage others to contact political representatives (22% vs. 5%) and five times as likely to recruit others to sign petitions for a cause or social issue (20% vs. 4%)" ("Slacktivists," 1). These data suggest that the contributors to groups such as Pantsuit Nation are as likely or more likely to engage in social and political activity offline, as the posts to Pantsuit Nation attest. This is not to say that all members of Pantsuit Nation participate equally – in the Facebook group or in offline activities – but rather that the high-profile contributions to the group and the narrative preferences of the group do support political action beyond the confines of social media.

Importantly, Pantsuit Nation moderators are keen to promote stories of political activity and regularly encourage members to post such narratives:

by asking directly, by posting information about how to call representatives or contribute to a cause, by posting stories about their own efforts to enact change offline, and by promoting certain member stories, like Berringer's, on the public side of the group. In this, the moderators and "high profile" contributors behave in a way similar to what Harlow found in "Social Media and Social Movements: Facebook and an Online Guatemalan Justice Movement that Moved Offline" where she discovered a difference in behavior between low-frequency and high-frequency contributors; the less-engaged members of the Facebook group might, indeed, have been critiqued as "slacktivists," but, by contrast, "the online Facebook activity of high-frequency posters also translated into offline participation . . . [and they] likewise were successful in their attempts to engage others, as their comments, which were more likely to be motivational and a call to arms, were 'liked,' or endorsed, more often" (238). One of the characteristics of social media groups like *Pantsuit Nation* is their size and diversity of population. This trait is valuable in that it affords participants the ability to circulate a broad range of ideas among a large membership, but the size of their populations also means that the group inspires varying levels of participation. Harlow's study suggests that those members most active and visible in the group are also likely to be individuals who are also active offline in their communities or in running for office. It is impossible to know the overall effect of social media groups on such individuals: whether online activity is just an extension of their ongoing political engagement or whether participation in groups like *Pantsuit Nation* serve a purpose in supporting and encouraging them to become more active. In late 2017, Chamberlain posted a survey to the private group in an attempt to learn just this: how members had used the *Pantsuit Nation* group and how it might have influenced their offline decisions. By the end of 2017, participation in this survey revealed that over 7,700 "relied on *Pantsuit Nation* for self-care," while over 7,400 reported that because of their participation in *Pantsuit Nation* they had "learned about a progressive organization or individual" and over 6,500 reported that they "participated in a political action (calling reps, etc.)." Over 5,000 respondents also said that they had attended a march or community event, or donated to a nonprofit or a candidate. One hundred and ten people reported that they decided to run for office "because of, at least in part, *Pantsuit Nation*." Given that the total membership of the group is about 3 million, these numbers are relatively small. Nonetheless, the survey results do suggest that for a contingent of active members, perhaps similar to those "high-frequency posters" Harlow studied, participation in and contribution to the Facebook group was a part of their movement offline into political action.

Storytelling is activism. Some members of the *Pantsuit Nation* group dismiss Chamberlain's claim that, in sharing stories, the participants of that

digital community were engaging in a powerful and political act. And this dismissal is not without merit. Pantsuit Nation, as a private Facebook community, places obvious limits on the circulation of the stories it claims are so powerful. Does participation only within a private group of fellow participants count as activism? Not all members of the group would give the same answer. In "The Personalization of Politics: Political Identity, Social Media, and Changing Patterns of Participation," W. Lance Bennett discusses the rise of "personalized politics" through social media. Bennett argues that the personalization of politics has been defined in part by "the rise of crowd-sourced inclusive personal action frames (e.g., "We are the 99%") that lower the barriers of identification" where participation is "channeled through often dense social networks over which people can share their own stories and concerns" (21, 22). Bennett further argues that the prevalence of personalized, political social networks can be problematic: on digital platforms with limited leadership and an emphasis on emotion over evidence "participants can pick their own outlets for anger," leading to fragmented rather than collective participation and goals (23). Such a critique could certainly be aimed at Pantsuit Nation, whose original mission – "wear a pantsuit on November 8 – *you know why*" (Chamberlain 1, emphasis mine) – was broad and an open invitation for members to provide their own individual answers for, or rather stories about, the political and social values of the group. This phrasing was intentional on the part of the group creators and is valuable in that it allows for many members to feel included. This mission of intent also failed to define, at the outset, the diverse and intersectional cause, and the push for offline activity, that Pantsuit Nation executives would later create and try to promote.

Even a casual survey of the private Facebook group in early 2017 would demonstrate that posters to Pantsuit Nation were overwhelmingly white. The whiteness of the Pantsuit Nation group was an is a symptom of already present social segregation rather than conscious creator intent. The group was originally created by a white woman for her friends, and subsequent Facebook users could only join the group if one of their friends was already a member. Thus, the demographics of the group was and is a reflection of an ever-extending friend circle originating with Chamberlain herself. Given this membership structure, it is no surprise that the make-up of Pantsuit Nation resembles Chamberlain and her friends. The Women's March, which also began on Facebook, was also disproportionately white. Undeniably, the struggle of Pantsuit Nation and the Women's March to cultivate a diverse membership in the beginning represents a significant downfall of social media-based political groups as they are currently structured, one that future social media organizers and contributors will have to recognize and consciously work against.

At the same time, Chamberlain and group moderators did work hard, after the fact, to create a diverse group of moderators and executives, and, more importantly, to promote contributions that highlighted the importance of race, class, and sexuality in feminist politics. One such post, by Grace, was featured prominently in the *Pantsuit Nation* book and demonstrates the extent to which the early Pantsuit Nation community was troubled by a lack of diversity and by members who did not agree on the importance of intersectional feminism. Grace begins by noting that “I have seen many posts saying, ‘We are all women,’ ‘I don’t see color,’ or ‘What does race have to do with anything?’ This is not only dismissive, it’s color-blind and very hurtful” (Chamberlain 146). The rest of the content of Grace’s post offers readers a lesson on privilege, racism, microaggressions, and intersectional feminism. The post generated a great deal of response on the private group before it was featured in the book, and is one of many examples of posts that were conspicuously re-promoted on the public side of Pantsuit Nation as moderators worked both to define the group as intersectionally feminist and to encourage more members to submit personal narratives that supported this mission.

Regular surveys of my own Pantsuit Nation feed reveal that, over time, more posts did indeed present narratives and identities complicated by intersections race, religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity. The structure of private Facebook groups makes it difficult to systematically research the posting history of the group page; research is best done “in real time” as group members actually participate. While the posts will always exist, it is impossible to conduct a search within a specified period: a search for “June,” for instance, will not generate a list of posts time-stamped from the month of June. Likewise, the sheer volume of posts, and the ability of commenters to move old posts forward on the timeline, means that it is also nearly impossible to retroactively read through the year-long timeline of the group. Thus, in order to track the overall progression of themes and topics in the group, I needed to regularly check in to the page, making notes and copying content to save at the time of their posting. There are obvious limitations to this research method. Nonetheless, the discussion I was able to track in my own Facebook feed indicates that by 2018 diverse, intersectional narratives were far more visible on Pantsuit Nation and were, additionally, far more likely to be reposted in public pages. This suggests that moderators were successful in reshaping the visible narratives of Pantsuit Nation and demonstrates the important role moderators and high-frequency contributors play in ensuring that the stories and discussions in digital groups reflect the experiences of a diverse range of women. While digital footprints remain indefinitely, social media platforms revolve around the content that is immediately current and popular. Moderators can use this function to revise the ongoing narratives that are defining the

identities and values of social media communities by boosting contributions that feature the stories they value and by explicitly calling for members to submit more contributions of this type, as the leaders of Pantsuit Nation did.

Thus, while the invitation-based membership structure and the storytelling focus of the group is always at risk of resulting in a fragmented sense of purpose or a homogenous representation of contributors, Pantsuit Nation also demonstrates the possibilities for digital groups to foster diversity and encourage offline engagement. Bart Cammearts, in "Technologies of Self-Mediation: Affordances and Constraints of Social Media for Protest Movements," reflects on the affordances and limitations of social media for promoting activism; he posits that traditional activist discourses "tend to be geared toward the building of collective identities, and they would generally advocate for collective solutions and call for collective actions. This is at odds with the individualistic and capitalist values inherent to the rationale and *raison d'être* of social media platforms" (106). The challenge Pantsuit Nation moderators faced in trying to, belatedly, establish a collective set of goals on a platform designed to be open to diverse, personal views and stories was significant. At the same time, however, this lack of cohesion means that participants are always still in the process of defining the space and can expand the narrative possibilities encouraged by the platform. The community discourse is always in flux, is continuously subject to commentary, revision, and recreation. While it would be a gross misrepresentation to suggest that the Pantsuit Nation group visibly presents *all* the diverse and complex stories of the 3.3 million members, it does succeed in presenting and inspiring multiple stories, and in so doing exposes Pantsuit Nation readers to a different set of narratives than they might have otherwise encountered on their general Facebook page. For some participants, too, these narratives, whether stories about wearing pantsuits, about mothers, histories, or political activity, offer information on important social issues and lessons in civic participation.

Moreover, members of Pantsuit Nation adopt and enjoy the power of storytelling on social media as a means of bringing themselves, their political and social goals, and their own histories into visibility in a broad digital community. Pantsuit Nation is not the only place they could do this as most participation on social media engages self-definition and narrative creation. What Pantsuit Nation offers, then, is an evolving set of narrative frameworks that participants can personalize and adapt, and a digital platform where moderators and members have never completed, and are always still in the process of, reshaping and redefining what the feminist community will look like.



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