



# Lesson: Defining Gender in the Digital Society

September 21, 2017



Lillian Mukasa and Danielle Mahn



# Soraya Chemaly



## *Feminism, Free Speech and the Internet*

WITH SORAYA CHEMALY

A discussion on how social media companies, now regulating speech across borders in unprecedented ways, arbitrate norms; how a lack of diversity in media and tech exacerbates online harassment; and how feminist counterspeech is working to expand free speech.

WEDNESDAY, NOV 18TH  
RUFFNER 008, 7PM

Soraya Chemaly is an award-winning feminist writer, media critic and activist whose work focuses on women's rights and the role gender plays in media, politics, religion, technology, and popular culture.



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# Soraya Chemaly

In her work, Soraya Chemaly focuses on the role gender plays in culture, politics, religion, and media. She is a writer and activist who has accomplished many things, as exemplified by her many positions and accolades.

## ***Positions and Roles:***

- First major position: editor and writer at Paris Passion/Time Out Magazine
- Founder and editor of Key DC (city-listings zine)
- Director of Corporate Marketing at the Gannet Corporation
- Launched the News and Media Division at Claritas, Inc.
  - ◆ Became Senior Vice President of Corporate Marketing
- Formed her own consulting firm in the media and data tech fields
- Currently the director of the Women's Media Center Speech Project and organizer of the Safety and Free Speech Coalition and still actively writes and speaks regularly about gender, media, tech, edu, women's' rights, sexual violence, and free speech

“Soraya Chemaly.” *Women's Media Center*, [www.womensmediacenter.com/profile/soraya-chemaly](http://www.womensmediacenter.com/profile/soraya-chemaly).

## Accolades:

- Work appears in TIME, The Guardian, The National Huffington Post and the Atlantic and Role/Reboot
- The Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication's Donna Allen Award for Feminist Advocacy
- The Secular
- Woman Feminist Activism Award
- Elle Magazine's 25 Inspiring Women to Follow on Twitter

## Articles, Publications, and Appearances:

- Fathers Are the Key to Ending Child Marriage Huffington Post [October 3, 2013]
- Breaking news on Facebook's - Tape Her & Rape Her Thom Hartmann TV [May 29, 2013]
- Social Media and Free Speech Arise America [April 6, 2013]
- Rape Represents Oppression AOL/Huffington Post [January 9, 2013]
- The real boy crisis: 5 ways America tells boys not to be 'girly' Salon [September 25, 2013]
- Facebook's big misogyny problem The Guardian [April 18, 2013]
- Facebook rejects rape. Can you? CNN [May 31, 2013]
- Why won't we talk about violence and masculinity in America Ms. Magazine [December 17, 2012]
- The Unsafety Net: How Social Media Turned Against Women The Atlantic [October 9, 2014]

“Soraya Chemaly.” *Women's Media Center*, [www.womensmediacenter.com/profile/soraya-chemaly](http://www.womensmediacenter.com/profile/soraya-chemaly).

# Critique of Chemaly's work

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/soraya-chemaly/catholic-leadership-does-not-represent-women\\_b\\_1276929.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/soraya-chemaly/catholic-leadership-does-not-represent-women_b_1276929.html)

## I'm No Longer a Catholic. Why Are You? HuffPost

-After the controversy over birth control, health coverage and the Catholic Church, Soraya made this statement saying that the Catholic Church does not support women.

-Sacerdotus on WordPress then blogged about Soraya's statements in a letter relevant to the article following its publishing.

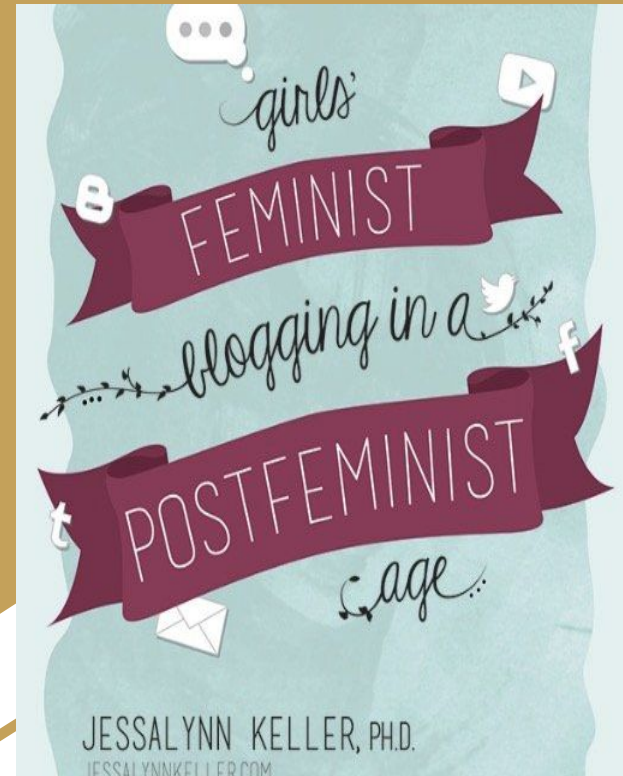
He wrote,

"[A supporter of Chemaly] become prisoner to the feminist rhetoric of others. Moreover, women become prisoner to the set parameters of gender essentialism as seen by the radical feminist movement. Your womanhood is not free if you imitate the ideas of what womanhood is from others" (Sacerdotus).

"She [Chemaly] believes that the Catholic Church "does everything within its power to make sure that we[women] cannot achieve our hopes..." This is an absolute falsehood. The Catholic Church does everything in her power to empower women, educate them and help them define their distinct role as given by God in society" (Sacerdotus).



Jessalynn  
Marie  
Keller



## OVERVIEW

- Keller is an Assistant Professor at the University of Calgary
- She has focused her career on extensive research and communication of her findings as well as teaching young adults on subjects of media and its ties with identity
- Keller's research delves into:
  - gender politics (how is this changing)
  - mediated identities (discussion of organic vs inorganic lifestyles)
  - All of this is within popular digital cultures in relation to contemporary feminist activism
- Major Themes discussed:
  - feminist blogging, teen feminist media, and the idea of changing ways to express political views online

## MAJOR WORKS

- ***Girls' Feminist Blogging in a Postfeminist Age***
  - Explores the practices of U.S.-based teenage girls who actively maintain feminist blogs and participate in the feminist blogosphere as readers, writers .
  - This is a major focus in her work; she aims to communicate the ideas of digital communication and how this new form of expression is developing the feminist movement
- Published works in the *Journal of Gender Studies*, *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, *Feminist Media Studies*, *Celebrity Studies*, *Information, Communication & Society*, and *Women's Studies International Forum*
- She is continuing to voice her views in her latest piece with Kaitlynn Mendes and Jessica Ringrose in their upcoming piece *Digital Feminist Activism: Women and Girls Fight Back Against Rape Culture*

# Critiques

- Keller voices her opinion that young girls are a counterpublic
- This calls into question her idea of the existence of different spectrums of feminism regarding race, class, sexual preference, gender, etc
- Many see this as contradictory
- In response, Keller makes it clear to sharpen her points, stating that “It is important to recognize that despite the continual spread of new media technologies, the “digital divide” remains a reality for many people both inside and outside the United States” (Keller 12)




# Internet Trolls and Online Abuse

- What are they
- What groups do trolls typically hit and who is affected by online harassment




1) To what extent does harassment and intimidation online distract or delay efforts toward the feminist movement?






2) How safe do you feel on the internet? Do you believe the restrictions and guidelines that social media puts in place are sufficient?






3) Why is blogging one of the better ways to get one's voice heard?  
What are the downsides to twitter, facebook, etc.



# Third Wave Feminism, The Use of the Digital World, and Modern Society

- What does this all mean in context to the articles?



1) Can you really be considered a feminist or an advocate for the feminist movement if you're not looking for ways for your voice to be heard?


Are you doing more than just reading about topics?

**Commenting and interacting ?**






2) “What counts as feminist activism”?



3) Why do you think such powerful movements (feminism) have to be marketed in such a way that has to be entertaining to be heard?





# History and Today, Negotiations, and “Ranting”

- **History of Feminist Activism In Relation To More Current Practices: Blackboard Handout**
- Keller discussed making deliberate negotiations to appease mainstream culture. (note 2 on the handout)
  - To what extent of negotiation is okay when dealing with mainstream culture? Is playful activism okay to attract an audience? Can you go further than playful activism and be sarcastic? Are deliberate negotiations giving way to serious matters, or are they necessary to be interesting and engaging?
- Keller also talks about blogging being therapeutic as a method of empowering feminists to talk back (we will revisit this) in an unwelcoming society.
  - In terms of blogging or posting online after a misogynistic instance instead of correcting the source of the misogyny or incorrectness, do you believe “ranting” online has some indirect or underlying, or even direct, feminist activism tied in?
  - Consider this: someone might find your blog or post and be inspired or feel a strong emotion about your experience, second-handedly, or if your own self has a revelation after “ranting”.

# Explicitly Defined “Feminism” and Blogging as Activism

- Redirect: Do the words “feminism” or “feminist” need to be explicitly stated in the pursuit of feminist activism? How should they be brought up, and can the words be used to incite “mainstream sympathy”(Keller 441)?
  - Food for Thought: Do other politically motivated arguments or actions have to include a specific keyword to be considered politics? (i.e. when supporting LGBTQ+ rights, does one have a responsibility to explicitly state he or she is an LGBTQ+ activist?)
- How does specifically blogging count as activism? What does it inspire to constitute activism? Do you feel that blogging even in a safe space like feminist forums could lead to serious and devastating harassment?
  - **Article from Human Rights Watch on Blackboard**



# The Final Discussion

Have you participated in “talking back?” How can we participate in talking back without getting harassed online? Is ranting on a blog, like Natalie, talking back? and if so, is it effective?

