Blogging Solo: Women Refiguring Singleness

Introduction

In this final chapter I turn my attention to the blogosphere as a potentially oppositional field where the dominant meanings around single-dom can be contested, negotiated, and rewritten. The single women blogosphere can be seen to challenge the texts and forms previously addressed in two key ways. Firstly, by providing counter-narratives to those that position singleness as a problem to be rectified; secondly, many of these blogs do not appear marred by the postfeminist (and indeed neoliberal) logics that characterize the media forms considered in previous chapters. That said, as in these earlier examples, there are actually a number of competing discourses about women’s singleness in the blogosphere – including blogs that presume women’s desperation (especially those in their 30s and 40s) to be otherwise – that must temper any simplistic celebration about how it is used. There is a clear distinction between what can be called dating singles’ blogs, which centre on how to find (and secure) a mate, and those considered here. That is, the blogosphere is not a priori oppositional or progressive as far as single women are concerned. As Graeme Turner argues, ‘there is nothing inherent in these technologies which privilege the liberal, the tolerant or the progressive in terms of the opinions they carry’ (2010, p. 140). I do not attend to such dating-focused sites as they simply reinscribe the types of cultural scripts and heteronormative ideologies that I have critiqued throughout this book. As one of the bloggers analyzed here remarks, ‘There is little community/support for single people that isn’t about hooking up’ (Singlutionary), and it is this supposedly universal truth that all women wish to be partnered along with the lack of support for those contesting this assumption, including within the
blogosphere, that the bloggers examined here explicitly seek to contest. The blogs upon which I do focus – including Singlutionary, Dazzlingly Single, Onely, Singletude, First Person Singular, The Spinster Chronicles, Rachel’s Musings, Single Women Rule, Living Single – are significant not just in terms of what they might tell us about women, mediated citizenship, and participation in the blogosphere but also about what they literally say about being a single woman in the twenty-first century West. Important here are not only the actual blogs themselves, but the textual community created when readers respond to various posts (i.e. how they function as an interactive space).

As I have shown throughout, single women in contemporary media culture are often yet pathologized, thought to be lacking, and as having failed to enter proper adulthood (i.e. not seen as viable citizens). Within these blogs, however, writers aim to refigure women’s singleness as well as providing resources, support, and a textual community where others can intervene in and contribute to the revaluation of single women. They act, therefore, as an important avenue in which single women can ‘talk back’ to mainstream media culture, challenging postfeminism especially. Rather than only considering the form in isolation from its content (as many commentators have done), this chapter analyzes the discourses deployed by bloggers and within blogs and how women bloggers publicly perform their very singleness as part of a personal and political strategy of resignification. It also places the discussion within the context of broader debates about the (often overestimated) democratic possibilities of this sphere, especially in terms of women and mediated citizenship and what Axel Bruns (2008) has called ‘produsage’. Moreover, in a context where feminism is now largely constituted within mainstream media culture and its presence therein is diffuse, it will show how these blogs, by acting to disrupt dominant media narratives around the woman without a man, can – like some of the book’s considered in the previous chapter – work as instances of popular feminism. While not all single women bloggers explicitly identify as feminist (though some do), it is clear that in attempting to revalue single life for women they are drawing on a series of assumptions, and often specialist discourses, consistent with feminism.

In terms of Angela McRobbie’s (2009) theorization of postfeminism as involving popular culture’s ‘double entanglement’ with feminism (relying upon while yet repudiating it) that has throughout framed my analysis, here I suggest that these blogs have a more complicated, and less pessimistic, relationship to feminism. That is, they do not seek to