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Exploring Disabled Girls' Online Self-Representation Practices

Abstract

Recently girlhood studies has witnessed a growing body of research into girls' self-representation practices, but disabled girls are largely absent from this work. This article intervenes in this area by asserting the need to explore disabled girls' self-representation practices as part of removing the "trump card" (Stienstra, 2015) of disability in order to consider the intersections between girlhood and disability. It is also an attempt to move away from discourses of risk that circulate around girls' digital self-representation practices by demonstrating how these practices provide disabled girls with visibility in a postfeminist mediascape that renders them invisible, and also act as a form of social advocacy and awareness raising. I then explore how disabled girls represent themselves online in a postfeminist cultural landscape, looking at how they must be seen as both motivated and motivational.

Keywords: Disability; girlhood; Instagram; postfeminism; selfie; self-representation

Introduction

There is a growing body of work in girls' media studies that addresses girls as active users and producers in the digital media landscape (Holmes, 2016; Kearney, 2011; Keller, 2015; Shields Dobson, 2015) and seeks to subvert popular discourses of risk that position girls' self-representation practices as trivial at best and dangerous at worst (Shields Dobson, 2015; Tiidenberg and Gomez, 2015), with which this article is aligned. However, this article

intervenes further into this work by specifically exploring disabled girls digital self-representation practices, as disabled girls are largely absent from existing research in this area.ⁱ In her article “Trumping All? Disability and Girlhood Studies” (2015), Deborah Stienstra calls for the removal of the “trump card of disability and [to] see girls with disabilities as an integral part of girl and girlhood studies” (54). Stienstra argues that disability is often framed as a problem or lack, and that experiences of disability for girls appear to “trump” or silence other experiences, such as those of sex and gender, and the intersections that exist between these (ibid). She notes how we “know little about how girls with disabilities see themselves... We know little about the intersections of being... a girl, and disabled” (ibid). Indeed this article will explore further some of the intersections between girlhood and disability through its examination of disabled girls’ digital self-representation practices. In doing so, this article draws upon a body of work that explores girls’ self-representation practices in relation to discourses of visibility, selfhood and surveillance, while also exploring the intersection between girls’ media studies, disability studies, and feminist work on the body. Exploring the intersections between disability and girlhood is crucial because, as feminist disability studies informs us, incorporating disability into explorations of gender helps us to further understand the relationship between identity and embodiment, and the environments in which we live (Lindgren, 2001: 146). Indeed, disability is often an invisible identity category. All too often work that explores constructions or representations of gender often fails to include disability as an intersectional identity category alongside class and race, which is indicative of the way in which disability has traditionally remained outside of questions of discourse and explorations of popular culture (Ellis, 2015).

In exploring disabled girls’ self-representation practices online, this article has two aims: firstly, to subvert the commonly held notion that girls’ self-representation practices are risky

and trivial (Hart and Mitchell, 2015: 136) by situating these practices as part of what Bock (2012) terms “technologies of non-violence”. I will argue that, far from being trivial, disabled girls’ self-representation practices often act as a form of advocacy and awareness raising, while providing them with a much-needed voice and visibility in a popular media landscape that typically renders them invisible. Secondly, this article will interrogate the role of the disabled girl within what Jessica Ringrose (2013) terms a “postfeminist mediascape”. To that end, the first part of this article will situate this research within existing work on girls’ self-representation practices, and also work on girlhood and disability in popular culture. The second part of this article will begin to explore disabled girls’ digital self-representation practices. Through a case study analysis of a disabled girl blogger who is severely sight impaired, I argue that disabled girls must negotiate contemporary postfeminist femininity within their self-representation practices by presenting themselves as both motivated and motivational subjects.

Postfeminist girlhood and self-representation in digital media culture

Any examination of contemporary girls’ self-representation practices takes place within a cultural landscape defined as postfeminist (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Gill, 2007; Harris, 2004; Keller, 2015; McRobbie, 2004, 2007, 2009; Shields Dobson, 2015; Tasker and Negra, 2007). I use the term “postfeminism” in line with McRobbie (2009) and Rosalind Gill (2007), who theorize postfeminism from a UK perspective and define it as a “double entanglement” of feminist and anti-feminist ideas. In this “double entanglement” elements of feminism have been “taken, and absolutely incorporated into [Western] political and institutional life” and a vocabulary of words like ‘choice’ and ‘empowered’ is then employed and “converted into an individualistic discourse” that is used as a “substitute for feminism” (McRobbie, 2009: 1).

While this article does not have the scope for a detailed discussion of postfeminism, it is worth outlining some of its key characteristics. As Rosalind Gill explains, one of the defining characteristics of postfeminism is a preoccupation with the body (2007: 149). In today's media, Gill argues, "possession of a 'sexy body' is presented as women's key (if not sole) source of identity", a body that is both a source of power and in constant need of monitoring and regulating (ibid). Other characteristics of postfeminism include "the shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline; [and] a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment" (ibid: 147). Moreover, in a postfeminist mediascape, women must be young women, and various scholars of girlhood have discussed how the figure of the girl has emerged from the 1990s onwards as a image of change and crisis, and how the idea of what it means to succeed or lose out in these neoliberal times is inextricably linked to girlhood (Driscoll, 2002; Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2009). As Gill and Scharff note, the "autonomous, self-calculating, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism" (2011: 7). This has resulted in the increased visibility of girls in contemporary Western media culture, leading Sarah Projansky to declare that twenty-first-century media culture is "obsess[ed] with girls" (2014: 95).

Although contemporary media culture is overwhelmingly preoccupied with girls, the parameters of what constitutes "acceptable" girlhood in postfeminist culture are very narrow; that is, girlhood that is white, heterosexual, middle-class and able-bodied (Projansky, 2014: 1). Postfeminist girlhood can be articulated through the phrase "girl power". Girl power is a "sexy, brash, individualistic expression of power, ambition and success" (Harris, 2004: 16). Therefore, girls are expected to be sexy (but not overly sexy),ⁱⁱ confident, independent, and active participators who set and achieve goals. Girl power, then, renders racial, classed and

disabled identities invisible. As Everelles and Mutua state, disabled girlhood challenges the heteronormativity that is present within notions of girl power, which:

rest[s]heavily on ableist ideologies of independence, assertiveness and strength, laced with patriarchal notions of beauty and attractiveness. Girl Power, thus defined, leaves neither material nor discursive spaces for differentially constituted disabled girlhood (2005: 254).

This lack of space for disabled girlhood within a postfeminist mediascape reinforces Stienstra's assertion that in examinations of disabled girlhood, disability "trumps" gender and we must explore disabled girlhood as part of a range of diverse girls, rather than as presenting them as out of the ordinary or as a problem that must be overcome (2015: 60). It is with this in mind that this article explores disabled girls' self-representation practices online, paying particular attention to how they negotiate the postfeminist media culture in which these self-representations are produced and distributed, but from which they are largely absent.

Postfeminist girlhood increasingly calls upon these confident girls to "make their private selves and 'authentic' voices highly visible in public" (Harris, 2004: 125), and as such girls and young women are particularly prominent creators of, and participants in, socially mediated online content, such as blogs and social networking sites. Moreover, they are encouraged to "brand" their self-representations in line with postfeminist femininity (Shields Dobson, 2015: 35). This emphasis on self-branding, along with other contemporary ideals such as individualism and self-monitoring, provides the context for understanding the increase in gendered social media production over the last decade which takes place within the typically feminine domains of fashion, beauty and craft. This includes fashion blogs and selfies,ⁱⁱⁱ make-up tutorial videos and sites dedicated to the making and purchasing of crafts and homemade goods (Duffy and Hund, 2015: 3).

However, despite girls and young women being prominent participators in the digital cultural production, their social networking and digital self-representation practices are often treated with disdain. Self-representation is a contemporary phenomenon that is intimately intertwined with digital media culture” (Thurmin, 2012: 3) and is a “condition of participation in Web 2.0” (ibid: 17). A key distinction between representation and self-representation is that self-representation appears less mediated and more agentic than forms of representation because it implies that mediators have been removed because a person is representing himself or herself. However, this is not the case and self-representation practices are still subject to processes of mediation according to the contexts in which they are created, displayed and distributed (Thurmin, 2012; Senft and Baym, 2015). In her analysis of the online commentary surrounding selfies, Anne Burns argues that “selfies have a regulatory social function in that there is a connection between the discursive construction of selfie practice and the negative perception of selfie takers”, which reflects “contemporary norms and anxieties, particularly relating to the behaviour of women” (2015:1716). She claims this discursively produced knowledge “maintains gendered power relations by perpetuating negative stereotypes that legitimize the discipline of women’s behaviours and identities” (ibid). Such stereotypes include narcissism, vanity and sexual impropriety. For Burns, “instead of being a positive tool for self-exploration and for mediating a position relative to one’s peers, photographic self-expression (particularly by women) is reframed as a matter of petty and squalid attention-grabbing” (ibid: 1723). Tiidenburg and Gomez Cruz similarly argue that “posting or exchanging selfies is seen as frivolous and self-absorbed, but the relationship between subjectivity, practice and social use of those images seems to be more complex than this dismissal allows” (2015: 2).

As the aforementioned work argues, there is clearly a need to look beyond gendered discursive constructions of the selfie that position it as a vain, narcissistic and trivial practice. I claim this is particularly important in relation to disabled girls and young women who are largely absent from discussions of digital self-representation practices, just as they are under-represented within the broader globalised mediascape of the twenty-first century. As will become apparent in the next section of this article, disabled girls' online self-representation practices, such as producing selfies and other forms of self-representation enables, these girls to gain visibility in a distinctly heteronormative and ableist mediascape and also engage in a form of advocacy through challenging stereotypes and ideas about disability. As Senft and Bayn assert, "Any time anyone uses a selfie to take a stand against racist, classist, misogynist, ageist or ableist views, issues of political power are clearly at stake" (2015: 1597).

Karolyn Gehrig's #Hospitalglam series is one such example of selfie production that is informed by a "politics of visibility" (Tembeck, 2016: 8). #Hospitalglam was launched in 2014 and can be found on the microblogging site Tumblr, as well as Gehrig's own Instagram account. As part of the project, Gehrig uses selfies to explore the relationship between "illness and representation in everyday life, shedding light on the personal and political stakes of making ill health visible online" (ibid: 3). Disability Studies scholars have frequently highlighted the "problematic" relationship between illness and disability (Wendell, 2016: 160). As Susan Wendell notes, disability activists and scholars have worked hard to promote the social model of disability - where disability occurs as a result of ableist social barriers (Ellis and Kent, 2011: 3) – and the identification of illness with disability further "contributes to the medicalization of disability in which disability is regarded as individual misfortune" (Wendell, 2016: 160). While this article is primarily concerned with exploring the self-representation practices of girls who live with disability rather than chronic illness,

the #Hospitalglam project is a useful example of how social media can be used to explore visibility politics and act as a form of advocacy. The visibility politics that play out within Gherig's #Hospitalglam project are also gendered in a number of ways. Firstly, women are statistically more likely than men to be disabled by chronic illness (ibid: 162), which reinforces the need for a project such as Gherig's. Secondly, Gherig's work continuously emulates the generic conventions of fashion magazines, which have a typically feminine mode of address. Her work is characterized by the production of glamorous selfies in a medical environment, such as a hospital treatment room, with medical equipment on display. The aesthetics often emulate glossy fashion magazine spreads with Gherig adopting a model-like pose; while in other photos she stares directly into the camera in a manner more commonly associated with the selfie. In emulating the aesthetics of fashion magazines – so often dismissed as trivial – Gherig's self-representation practices are performing on a number of levels: on the one hand, she is making her illness visible on a personal level by drawing attention to it when it is not always obvious, while, on a broader level, asking questions about how we perceive illness and what it means to “look” disabled. In addition, the images function as a form of advocacy as Gherig reminds Tumblr users of the importance of self-care, and how “controlling how you look when you can't control much else, photographing yourself, and seeking support are all part of that” (Gherig, 2014). Indeed, #Hospitalglam has developed into a community of people – mostly young women – who post their own selfies under the #Hospitalglam and support each other through their lived experiences of chronic illness and disability. It has been noted that platforms that characterize Web 2.0, such as social networking sites like Twitter and video- and image-sharing sites such as Tumblr and YouTube provide people with disabilities with a new voice and enable them to create more connected communities that provide exposure to political issues surrounding disability that

have typically be deemed personal, and #Hospitalglam can certainly be viewed as part of this work (Ellis and Kent, 2011).

Gehrig's work raises interesting questions, not only what it means to look disabled, but also about which disabled or chronically ill people are encouraged to come forward and be visible in the contemporary mediascape. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (2015) refer to this embracing of certain types of disabled bodies as "neoliberal inclusionism". "Neoliberal inclusionism" is "specifically associated with disabled bodies operative in the policy world of neoliberalism" (ibid: 4). Here a "formerly stigmatized" group, such as those labelled disabled, are made newly visible through the adoption of various diversity-based practices in areas such as education and employment on the condition that they can appropriate "historically specific expectations of normalcy" based around ideals of able-bodiedness, rationality and heteronormativity (ibid: 4). Inclusionism, therefore, requires that disability be tolerated as long as it does not require an excessive amount of change from the largely inflexibly institutions and normative modes of belonging. Disabled people are expected 'fit in' by "passing as nondisabled, or at the very least not too disabled" (ibid: 15). Mitchell and Snyder refer to those disabled people who are "paradoxically" able to gain entrance into neoliberal culture as the "able-disabled". These "able-disabled" "exceed their disability limitations through forms of administrative 'creaming' or hyper-prostheticization but leave the vast majority of disabled people behind" (ibid: 12). This idea that neoliberal inclusionism offers a "grudging recognition" of those disabled people who can most easily "pass" as able-bodied (ibid: 2) is reminiscent of neoliberal postfeminism enabling girls and young women to "come forward" (McRobbie, 2009: 54) and participate in Western political and institutional life, on the basis that these girls are white, heterosexual, thin and able-bodied. The remainder of this article will be devoted to exploring how disabled girls present themselves online and

how they negotiate this postfeminist mediascape. I argue that while these digital self-representation practices provide disabled girls with much-needed visibility that is neither trivial or risky, this visibility is granted largely on the conditions of “neoliberal inclusionism” and the ability to “fit in” (Mitchell and Snyder, 2015: 15). More specifically, I argue, these disabled girls must present themselves paradoxically as both motivated and motivational subjects.

Method

The research that is presented in this article forms part of the initial findings of what will be a wider research project that explores how disabled girls represent themselves online. In using the term “disabled” I do so in alignment with the social model of disability. This social model of disability claims that a “limitation in a person’s physical or mental functioning becomes a disability because of the impact of prevailing ableist social structures” (Ellis and Kent, 2011: 3). While the social model of disability is useful in that it situates disability a cultural and political position in a similar way to other binary distinctions rather than presenting disability as a “problem” that the individual must overcome, I am aware that it has its limitations, particularly from a feminist perspective. As Reinke and Todd (2016) state, “We know that disability is much more complicated and the social model can elide the messy, fleshy, nuanced texture of disabled people’s lives” (99). Although I include a range of impairments under the term “disability”, I in no way wish to universalize disability, as each individual will have a different lived experience of disability. The arguments presented here highlight some of the key recurring themes that have emerged during the research process so far. Due to the limited scope of this article, I have chosen to centre my analysis on a case study of one particular disabled girl blogger who exemplifies these key themes. Hannah^{iv} is a twenty-two -

year-old UK-based fashion, beauty and lifestyle blogger, who is severely sight impaired. In referring to Hannah as a girl, I am acknowledging that she identifies as a girl,^v as well as highlighting how the category of girlhood is increasingly expanding. As Anita Harris notes, although the term “girlhood” problematically implies a “natural, fixed state of being for that category”, nowadays, the category of “girl” in the contemporary mediascape extends to include the tween-age girl –aged between nine and fourteen – as well as the girling of older women in their thirties and forties (2004: 191).

As is typically of lifestyle bloggers, Hannah is active over numerous interlinked digital platforms, maintaining a blog and a YouTube channel as well as social media accounts such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. While I will refer to outputs on these platforms in order to provide contextual information, due to space limitations I have chosen to limit my analysis here to focus on Hannah’s Instagram posts from January-November 2016, which are presented under the same brand name as her blog. As bloggers post numerous photos on Instagram per week, I felt I had reached data saturation after this point. I will use textual analysis to explore how Hannah’s Instagram posts, which includes photos and accompanying captions, illustrate some of the key ways in which disabled girls construct their self-representations online and how they negotiate the postfeminist visual culture in which these self-representations are produced.

Make up and motivation

As Duffy and Hund (2015) note, the last decade has “witnessed a proliferation of socially mediated cultures of creative production located in the traditionally feminine domains of fashion, beauty, parenting, and craft” (2015: 1). Of these, they argue, fashion blogging is

“one of the most commercially successful and publicly visible forms of digital cultural production” (ibid). However, disabled women and girls are typically absent from existing research in this area. In their research into self-branding amongst mainstream fashion bloggers, Duffy and Hund argue that the bloggers they studied “performed visibility according to scripts that made them simultaneously relatable and aspirational” (2015: 7). Here I will demonstrate that disabled girl bloggers gain visibility through presenting themselves as motivated and motivational.

Hannah’s self-branding as a disabled fashion and beauty blogger is indicative of the importance placed upon beauty and the presentation of heterosexual femininity in postfeminist culture as part of what McRobbie (2009) terms the “postfeminist masquerade”.^{vi} Typically, disabled people have been positioned outside of discourses of beauty, as they have been thought of as being unwilling and/or unable to ascribe to cultural standards of beauty (Ellis, 2015). Earlier work on gender and disability has described how female disabled bodies can be viewed and experienced as “doubly corporeal, doubly devalued, and... doubly shameful” (Lindgren, 2001: 147), and as such disabled women are not subject to the same social expectations to conform to the same cultural standard of beauty and able-bodied women. This is something that Hannah draws attention to in her creative productions. For example, in a YouTube video themed around the awkward and inappropriate comments people say to her, Hannah talks about how she regularly gets comments such as, “You don’t look blind” and “how can you put make-up on if you can’t see?” She then goes on to explain how these comments are both offensive and incorrect.

However, as Ellis (2015) notes, recent work in disability studies has begun to focus on the importance of discourses of beauty and the inclusion of disability within them. This is

particularly important when exploring disabled girls' self-representation practices online because to ignore discourses of beauty in relation to disabled girls and young women fails to take into account that they are producing themselves in a postfeminist cultural landscape that places great emphasis on adhering to cultural and gender norms through beauty practices and beauty is therefore part of their lived experiences. Therefore, to exclude disabled girls and young women from discourses of beauty may serve as another site of what Ellis terms "cultural disablement" (ibid). This exclusion from discourses of beauty is acknowledged through the re-framing of beauty as a form of advocacy that is beneficial to other disabled girls. For example, Hannah writes on her blog that her motivation for starting her blog arose as a way of responding to the aforementioned inappropriate questions with the aim of challenging some of the "myths" surrounding sight loss and visual impairment. She asserts how she wants to challenge perceptions of sight loss through her passion for fashion, beauty and style and to make fashion more accessible and inclusive. This sense of advocacy is also evident in posts where Hannah discusses her work with charities and other organisations on raising awareness of sight impairment and accessibility.

In many ways, Hannah's Instagram feed, like those of other disabled girl bloggers, is reminiscent of the Instagram feeds of well-known able-bodied lifestyle bloggers and it conforms to the codes and conventions of lifestyle blogs and self-representation genres. This includes photos of close-ups of collections of beauty products – known as "hauls" – seasonal outdoor scenes, and selfies taken in a mirror. Photos are also often filtered or lit with high key lighting. Typically, selfies are used to showcase make-up designs that are linked to YouTube tutorials and they are captioned with a list of the products used. As Valerie Gannon and Andrea Prothero note, these "beauty selfie sub-types" carry "specific meanings for bloggers – of teaching, sharing, sincerity and authenticity – and are intertwined with significant life

stories” (2016: 1865). On the one hand, the use of selfies for teaching is in line with fashion and beauty blogging conventions, whereby selfies are used to teach followers how to re-create various make-up designs. However, here teaching is also linked to disability advocacy, as demonstrated by Hannah’s desire to help other visually impaired girls by providing them with the skills and knowledge to create their own style. Moreover, for disabled girl bloggers such as Hannah, this teaching is framed through motivational discourses, which becomes more overt whenever aspects of her sight impairment is particularly apparent. For example, in one post Hannah is photographed sitting next to her guide dog. In the accompanying caption, she encourages followers to think positively in order to achieve their goals, and it is implied that this something she also does. Hannah’s self-representation practices indicate a paradoxical subject position: she is motivated, striving to achieve her goals in accordance with postfeminist “can-do” girlhood, but, at the same time, she is also motivational.

Hannah’s status as a motivational subject is also tied in with notions of authenticity.

Authenticity is a key discourse surrounding fashion, beauty and lifestyle blogging, as well as girls’ self-representation practices more broadly (Gannon and Prothero, 2016: 1875). As Duffy and Hund note, bloggers share elements of their personal lives and “let their guard down” seemingly in an attempt to depict themselves as “authentic” (2015: 7). According to Sarah Banet-Weiser, authenticity is part of the “moral framework” of self-branding and is based on traditional notions of authenticity as being open and transparent, without artifice. Authenticity, she argues, is not only viewed as “residing inside the self but is also demonstrated by allowing the outside world to access one’s inner self” (2012: 60). These discourses of authenticity, such as being true to oneself and believing in oneself, occur most often in posts where disability or impairment is most visible, such as in Hannah’s aforementioned photo. This link between authenticity and disability is reinforced through the

act of sharing information about their disability that non-disabled audiences may not be aware of. For example, Hannah invites followers to contact her through her Instagram feed in order to ask her questions about anything they would like to know about her, including questions about her sight impairment, which she will then answer via a YouTube video. As Duffy and Hund state, the idea that bloggers must present themselves as authentic relies on their “emotional labor” (2015: 3), which “requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (Hochschild, 1983: 7). Duffy and Hund note how emotional labor is gendered as it is part of a long history of women’s work that is “undervalued and underpaid” (2015: 3). In the case of disabled girl bloggers, this emotional labor is seemingly heightened as it is not only gendered but also intertwined with their identity as a disabled girl as they are also required to respond to, and sometimes challenge, people’s notions of disability, which is framed as awareness raising in accordance with their position as motivational subjects.

Inviting and answering questions creates opportunities for the kind of awareness raising and advocacy that Hannah outlines in her blog through educating those who are not disabled. It could also potentially provide a space for those who may live with a similar disability to share their experiences and create a community in a similar manner to the aforementioned #Hospitalglam project, which utilizes the rhetoric of lifestyle blogs for the purpose of patient empowerment (Tembeck, 2016: 6). Thus, these self-representation practices evoke Bock’s (2012) concept of “technologies of non-violence” in that their digital practices demonstrate the potential these technologies offer for raising awareness, advocacy and prompting social action. However, the fact that self-representation practices such as Hannah’s are constructed through the normative aesthetics of fashion and beauty blogging also complicates this idea of awareness raising because it would not be immediately obvious to users who are quickly

scrolling through images in their feed. This suggests that awareness raising must be made more palatable, particularly for able-bodied audiences, which also shores up able-bodied hegemony through neoliberal inclusionism. As mentioned earlier, neoliberal inclusionism requires that disability be tolerated as long as it does not “demand an excessive degree of change” and the disabled person has the ability to “fit in” and not appear too disabled (Mitchell and Snyder, 2015: 15). Neoliberal inclusionism also enables the “embrace of some forms of difference through making them unapparent” (ibid: 4). Therefore, any awareness raising is rendered acceptable when contained within the recognized aesthetics of girls’ self-representation practices because these visual codes work to make the intention behind the posts less apparent and the disabled body within them more normative.

In their simultaneous position as motivated and motivational subjects, disabled girl bloggers such as Hannah appear to invoke aspects of the “supercrip” discourse that is widely used within Disability Studies, whereby a disabled person is represented as inspirational, and individual attitude, perseverance and determination are presented as a means of “overcoming” disability (Schalk, 2016: 73). However, as Sami Schalk argues, the term “supercrip” has become somewhat of a catchall term that encompasses a wide variety of representations of disability. Moreover, analyses of the supercrip discourse often “dismiss the possibility of finding positive aspects of representation” or assume that these representations are unhelpful to disabled people, leading Schalk to call for a more nuanced approach to supercrip representations (ibid: 71). Schalk also proposes that it may be more useful to consider self-presentation of disability as separate and different from other supercrip narratives, which typically media representations (ibid: 82). Therefore, the use of motivated and motivational subjects, I argue, helps to better explore the nuances, complexities and ambivalences within the self-representation practices of disabled girls, which my analysis has

demonstrated. Moreover, when analyzing girls' self-representation practices, it is important to take into account the "generic context" in which these representations are being produced (Cheyne, 2013: 44). Although the fact that the girls' self-representation practices are constructed in line with the normative aesthetics of self-representation genres potentially obscures their awareness raising function, it is equally important to recognize that they are working within the "generic limits" of socially mediated digital production (Schalk, 2013: 82) as they create and distribute their digital self-representations within a postfeminist mediascape.

Conclusion

In summary, this article has contributed to a growing body of work on girls' self-representation practices and intervened in this area by asserting the need to explore the self-representation practices of disabled girls, who are largely absent from existing work. It also highlighted the need to move away from the discourses of risk that have tended to dominate discussions of girls' self-representation practices by demonstrating how engaging in self-representation practices on social networking sites provides disabled girls with much needed visibility in a cultural landscape that typically renders them invisible.

Through my analysis, I have demonstrated that disabled girls' self-representation practices position them as both motivated and motivational subjects. In doing so, they tend to shore up discourses of "can-do" (Harris, 2004) girlhood through the premise of "neoliberal inclusionism", which embraces disability on the condition that it is not too apparent (Mitchell and Snyder, 2015: 15). Furthermore, while socially mediated productions provide opportunities for disability advocacy and awareness raising in line with Bock's (2012) notion

of “technologies of non-violence”, this is made more palatable through their integration within the normative aesthetics self-representation genres. Although this leaves little room for alternative embodiments of disabled girlhood, I do not wish to undermine the important awareness raising work that girls like Hannah do, and we must recognize that they are performing their visibility within the constraints of the genre in a postfeminist mediascape that is significantly ableist and heteronormative. In exploring disabled girls’ digital self-representation practices, this article has highlighted some of the ambivalences, contradictions and complexities within disabled girls’ social media production that make this a rich area of study, and it is crucial that we continue to view disabled girls, and their media production, as a significant part of girlhood studies.

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^{i i} I have chosen to use the term “disabled girls” rather than “girls with disabilities” because as Todd (2016), Overboe (1999) and others have argued, the phrase “person with disability” suggests a “‘normative’ resemblance that we can attain if we achieve the status of being deemed ‘people first’ (with the emphasis on independence and extreme liberal individualism) in the eyes of an ableist society” (Overboe, 1999: 24).

ⁱⁱ While postfeminist girls are celebrated for being more confident and resilient than previous modes of femininity, this has given rise to fears and anxieties, which Jessica Ringrose terms “postfeminist panics”. These panics include concern over the sexualisation of girls and the idea that it is “too much too young” and concern over “mean girl” behaviour – often evident in discussions on cyberbullying - which is deemed a consequence of girl power being taken “too far” (2013: 5).

ⁱⁱⁱ A selfie is a self-portrait taken at arms length. Its prevalence in popular culture is demonstrated by its status as the Oxford English Dictionary’s Word of the Year in 2013 (Tiidenburg and Gomez Cruz, 2015: 2).

^{iv} Names have been changed. I have chosen to de-identify this blogger as although the blogs, Instagram posts and YouTube videos I analyze here are readily available on the Internet, they were not produced for the purposes of academic analysis.

^v Hannah refers to herself as a “girlie girl”, which not only indicates that she identifies as a girl, but also the use of the word “girlie” is associated with the playful girlishness of postfeminist femininity (McRobbie, 2009: 24).

^{vi} Postfeminism's emphasis on choice means that women can choose to adopt an "openly fictive" mask of womanliness that displays traditional markers of femininity, such as make-up and other beauty routines and reframes them as freely chosen. The postfeminist emphasis on choice means that women no longer seek male approval, so the fashion and beauty industries emerge as an authoritative regime that reinstates self-imposed feminine cultural practices as the norm (McRobbie, 2009: 63).