As a feminist concept and practice, the personal has its own dynamic history. In the early seventies, the emphasis on “breaking silence” and “naming one’s oppression” brought the practice of consciousness-raising to the forefront of the feminist movement. The slogan “the personal is political” was coined by Carol Hanisch in 1969 in a Redstockings pamphlet and became the main slogan of second-wave feminism in the United States. This slogan arose out of a recognition that the private domain is from the beginning publicly and politically constructed by patriarchal ideologies and that it is there that power relationships based on sex and gender are played out. “It means,” writes Catherine MacKinnon, “that women’s distinctive experience as women occurs within that sphere that has been socially lived as the personal—private, emotional, interiorized, particular, individuated, intimate—so that what it is to know the politics of women’s situation is to know women’s personal lives” (21). In so doing, feminists challenged women’s exclusion from the public world of politics and economics, while reintroducing the personal experience of being female into the political discourse of the day (Evans 290). They worked to extend the meaning of “the political” to include areas of social life previously treated as “personal.”

Relating personal experiences in the context of “consciousness raising” was so well-established in early second-wave feminist theory and practice that MacKinnon designated it the feminist methodology (1982). As Lisa Maria Hogeland defines it,
“The basis of consciousness-raising, according to the guide to consciousness-raising published in *Radical Feminism* in 1973, was to share women’s personal experiences in order to understand them as the ‘result not of an individual’s idiosyncratic history and behavior, but of the system of sex-role stereotyping’—to understand the shared personal narratives produced in the group as ‘political, not personal’” (298–299). The practice not only has enabled scholars to better understand and critique the formation of the dichotomy of public versus private (a long-standing binary opposition in Western political thought) but also has opened possibilities for public discussions of the personal and of private issues and rendered women’s experiences an important source of knowledge. Bonnie Zimmerman (1985), moreover, argues that the centrality of consciousness-raising engendered a focus on personal narrative in both theory and practice. Such emphasis on personal experience led to feminist theorizing in the form of personal narratives.

Since the 1980s, feminist theorizing has started to include and valorize personal narratives. Sidonie Smith’s seminal work “Poetics of Women’s Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation” begins to address theoretical concerns of women’s autobiographical writing as it becomes an important branch of feminist studies. Nancy K. Miller’s *Getting Personal* further explores the possible meanings of the growing use of “the personal” within feminist scholarship. Miller notes, “If one of the original premises of seventies feminism (emerging out of sixties slogans) was that ‘the personal is the political,’ eighties feminism has made it possible to see that the personal is also the theoretical: the personal is part of theory’s material” (21). Gayle Greene also argues that “personal criticism, rather than a practice pitted against theory and reinforcing the usual binaries (personal against public, female against male, concrete against abstract), may be imbricated in theory in a way which broadens the notion of theory; and that, far from turning in on itself in a response which is trivial, self-indulgent, merely personal, such writing is ‘engaged’” (20). Indeed, feminist theory has been close to and often built out from the personal experience.

In recent years, we have seen the appearance of a number of influential third-wave feminist writings that mark a return to the personal, and seem to continue feminism’s long-standing
recognition of the political underpinnings of personal life. This article aims to explore the ways in which “personal narrative” is being reclaimed and renegotiated by contemporary young women who identify themselves as third-wave feminists. It also attempts to identify the particular contexts and conditions in which third-wave women redefine feminist identity and community by engaging the complexities of differences, ambiguities, and multiplicities in and between women. Whereas personal narratives of recent third-wave women are very much indebted to the earlier texts by feminists in the second wave, they differ in their tone, in their modes of analysis, and in their ways of formulating transformative politics. In their personal narratives, third-wave women recognize that they have to formulate their vision within an altered theoretical and political framework. In particular, it is by the influence of postmodernist, poststructuralist, and multiculturalist critiques of second wave feminisms that their return to the personal in the context of the early 1990s differs from consciousness-raising in the early second wave.

To understand how third-wave feminists conceive their agenda and the politics that advance it in the U.S., I will engage in close readings of three texts by American third wavers: Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation (Barbara Findlen, 1995); To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism (Rebecca Walker, 1995); and Colonize This! Young Women of Color on Today’s Feminism (Hernandez and Rheman, 2002). I select these books for three reasons. First, regarded as key articulations of the emerging feminist movement, they are especially prominent in academic discussions. Second, the collections of personal essays selected include a substantial number of young women who describe how they understand and practice feminism. Finally, the limited space of a single article can focus adequately only on the position of third-wave feminism in the American cultural and political context. I am aware of the diverse and overlapping ways in which the notion of “third-wave feminism” is appropriated by women in the global north and south. In particular, while most women in the global north represent feminist history as a succession of three waves running from the later nineteenth century to the present day, women in the global south, though enthusiastically responding to third-wave feminist ideas, do not see their feminist movement as a linear, progressive development under the
influence of colonization and nationalism. By analyzing these three anthologies, I will demonstrate how young women in the third wave appropriate the personal mode to reveal the political and theoretical element in being a woman in the twenty-first century. Reconceptualizing personal narrative as a critical method and practice both to shed new light on feminist identity and to reimagine a feminist community, third-wave women not only address how feminism informs and complicates their sense of identity but also show how they position themselves along the continuum of American feminist history.

**Reconstructing Feminist Subject**

When the third wavers first declared their agenda in the form of personal narrative, some scholars who were quick to dismiss the potential of third-wave feminist writing argued that such writing lacked the organization and the language that feminist scholars have typically pursued so as to secure acceptance within the academy (Lotz 2003). Some even denigrated such personal narratives as “too confessional, whiny or subjective” (Katha Pollitt, 1999). Wendy Kaminer, for instance, regards those personal narratives as merely tales of growing up or, worse, immature complaints against established feminism. But rather than invalidate or discredit it, other scholars such as Lisa Maria Hogeland, Amber Kinser, Jennifer Drake, and Deborah Siegel argue that the third-wave personal narrative may produce a new repertory for an enlivening cultural criticism. Claiming, for example, that the personal is the legitimate site of theoretical production, Siegel, in “The Legacy of the Personal: Generating Theory in Feminism’s Third Wave,” focuses on the centrality of personal strategies in the production of new third-wave feminist theory and practice. By demonstrating their theoretical similarities, Siegel’s analysis attempts to bridge the distance between academic feminist theory and more youthfully generated activism and writings. Siegel lauds the reclamation of feminism’s new wave as a strategic response to

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1 For more responses from feminists from the global south, see Angeli R. Diaz’s “Postcolonial Theory and the Third Wave Agenda,” and Su-lin Yu’s “Third Wave Feminism: A Transnational Perspective.”
the media’s production of “postfeminism” and to the academically fostered assault on representations of feminist subjectivity.

Indeed, third-wave stories are not solely about the individual but are connected to longer traditions of feminist theorizing and practice. Because their personal experiences still offer value in feminist theory-building and activism, we should explore the possibilities of third-wave feminist writing rather than dismiss it. Some of their more recent writings have made concerted efforts to more explicitly “use personal experience as a bridge to larger political and theoretical explorations of the third wave” (Dicker and Piepmeier 13). One can look back to previous generations, particularly the feminist work of women of color, to identify this practice of connecting the immediacy of personal experiences with theoretical production. For women of color in the previous generation, personal narrative has been the only option to document their lives and their histories. It is the manner in which they reconstructed their truths while interrupting dominant misrepresentations of their lives. Theorizing from their experience of multiple oppressions, feminists of color—including Chela Sandoval, Barbara Smith, Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lord, Maxine Hong Kingston, bell hooks, Alice Walker, and many others—have critiqued racism, heterosexism, homophobia, and class-bias among women and even among feminists. These writers not only address their experiences with racism on a material level, but they also explore the ways in which feminist theory is written. They challenge the traditional ways of perceiving knowledge production (i.e., the view that knowledge is produced only by intellectuals who write in highly sophisticated language) by showing that feminist theorizing can take place through multiple artistic as well as literary modalities. Third-wave feminists, then, draw on the experiences of their predecessors and then adapt their rhetorical strategies to new situations and cultural contexts.

In the third wave, personal narrative continues to play an important role in helping young women recognize that their experiences of oppression or discrimination are not isolated. The anthology format in which the editors collect their personal experiences functions as a literary representation of multiple subjectivities in a coalitional form. I am particularly interested in the ways that personal stories in the third-wave anthologies such as Colonize This!, Listen Up, and To Be Real represent a variety
of diverse, and even contradictory, subject-positions within an anthology that remains coherent overall. On the one hand, the coalitional nature of the anthology can allow for an expanded notion of feminist subjectivity; on the other, the anthology also subsumes the multiplicity of the contributors’ experiences into a singular political/theoretical position—the third wave. In all these particular texts, personal experience is used to ground the construction of feminist communities and/or political positions. Anthologies such as these were not only created in order to address issues of racism within the feminist community but also to prevent a critique of any notion of unified, coherent feminist subjectivity.

In keeping with the notion developed by second-wave feminists that “the personal is political,” the twenty-three contributors in *To Be Real* offer varied perspectives and experiences that challenge our stereotypes of feminist beliefs as they negotiate the troubled waters of gender roles, identity politics and “power feminism.” Their stories are very personal because, according to Rebecca Walker, the volume’s editor, “personal stories are the most political” (xvi). Walker makes an explicit point of selecting pieces for *To Be Real* written from personal perspectives, “because they build empathy and compassion, [they] are infinitely more accessible than more academic tracts, and because I believe our lives are the best basis for feminist theory” (xxxvii). She writes,

> this continuing legacy of feminism, which demands that we know and accept ourselves, jettisoning societal norms that don’t allow for our experiences, is a politically powerful decision. For, in these days of conservative and exclusionary politics . . . it is more important than ever to fight to be all of who we are. Rather than allowing ourselves and others to be put into boxes meant to categorize and dismiss, we can use the complexity of our lives to challenge the belief that any person or group is more righteous, more correct, more deserving of life than any other. (xxxix)

*To Be Real* is tightly focused in its attempts to assess feminism’s applicability to young women in the 1990s. In the introduction, Walker explains what she looked for in the essays to be included in the volume: “I wanted to explore the ways that choices or actions seemingly at odds with mainstream ideas of feminism push us to new definitions and understandings of female empowerment
and social change” (xxxvi). Thus, each story is an enticing variation on the same theme: working through contradictions. Walker encourages authors to “be personal, honest, and [to] record a transformative journey,” usually from anger with, guilt from, or resentment toward an image of the “ideal feminist” they wanted to be but of which they were nevertheless somewhat skeptical. More than just an editorial choice on Walker’s part, however, navigating feminism’s contradictions—historical, cultural, and psychological—is a primary theme of third-wave feminism.

Like Walker, Findlen compiled stories of women’s experiences to form the basis for political action. She noted that women’s experiences of sexism are far from universal; they are shaped also by race, class, location, ability, sexuality, and religion. “So what may appear to be a splintering in this generation often comes from an honest assessment of our differences as each of us defines her place and role in feminism” (xiii–xiv). The writers in Findlen’s *Listen Up* face these negotiations and contradictions through sharing their personal stories of defining themselves as young feminists. Examining their lives and experiences, third-wave writers strive to demonstrate how feminist ideas function in everyday life, continuing and building on the feminist tradition of allowing the personal to influence our theory.

*Colonize This! Young Women of Color on Today’s Feminism* (2002) provides another glimpse into third-wave feminism from the vantage point of women of color. The anthology includes contributions by women from various ethnic, racial, religious, and class backgrounds, and with various sexual orientations. Many of the contributors are first-generation immigrants. Much like *This Bridge Called My Back* (1984), *Colonize This!* is filled with personal narratives with strong political overtones. Referring to *Bridge* as a book that was significant to their feminist and womanist awakenings, the authors in *Colonize This!* recognize that women of color are important to the formulation and praxis of their own feminism. As Daisy Hernandez and Bushra Rehman self-consciously describe *Colonize This!* the book is “a way to continue the conversations among young women of color found in earlier books like *This Bridge Called my Back* and *Making Face, Making Soul*” (xxi).

Deconstructing any simple notion of identity categories, the contributors utilize personal narrative in order to theorize more complicated notions of identity, insisting on contradictory and
paradoxical concepts of subjectivity. In this way, their personal narratives illustrate the potential to subvert simplistic understandings of identity through the inclusion of multiple subject-positions; the various positions are not only different but are examined in relation to each other. This emphasis on the complexities of individual women’s lives allows for a more complicated understanding of female subjectivity. These writings subvert any simplistic focus on a single axis of oppression. In other words, the third wavers use personal narratives specifically to challenge the coherence of definitions of the feminist rather than to consolidate a unified concept of identity. Many of the younger feminists really do seem less concerned about forging a monolithic identity and more interested in “weaving an identity tapestry,” as Sonja D. Curry-Johnson describes it. Since the anthology format represents a variety of subject-positions in one text and demands a more fragmented or multiplied understanding of the self, it is therefore able to subvert the tendency of autobiography toward essentializing definitions of identity through a careful examination of intersections of structural axes of oppression.

Re-Imagining Feminist Community

For the third wavers, personal narratives are not only created to challenge any notion of unified, coherent feminist subjectivity, but also to ground the construction of their communities and/or political positions. The construction of a third-wave identity requires a community that supports that identity. Yet building such a community first requires both a withdrawal of support or belief in the values and structures of a prior community or culture and the creation of new values and structures. To the third wavers, identification as a member of such a community also often occurs as an oppositional differentiation from other groups, who are feared or at best devalued. The growth of the third-wave community is directly related to the reevaluation and the reinterpretation of the feminist community. If feminist change is possible at all, it must, third wavers believe, begin from interventions in the contradictions and tensions of the existing feminist community. A third-wave feminist community arises in this way as a response to prevailing political positions. On the one hand, third wavers attempt to distinguish feminism and feminists of the
present moment from those of the 1960s and 1970s. On the other, they intend to separate themselves from a vocabulary of “postfeminism.” “Third-Wave feminism” is also employed as an oppositional name, one identifying resistance to antifeminist ideas. To situate itself against such other positions as antifeminism, postfeminism, and Second-Wave feminism, Third-Wave feminism has declared an agenda of its own that exerts a powerful change on current feminist community.

To understand the third-wave feminist community, one must remember the motivations behind its feminist agenda. One of the central functions of and aims for third-wave feminism has been the establishment of a new community, a new locus for the production of meaning and identity in the lives of young women. In perceiving this need, Rebecca Walker, cofounder and president of Third-Wave Foundation, established third wave as “an organization devoted to young feminist activism” (1). Growing up within the backlash against feminism, poststructuralism, and multiculturalism, many young women are grappling with the process through which the contributors to the movement came to identify as feminist. Such young women are the first generation to grow up with feminism as a part of their lives. They reveal a desire to reconcile the contradictions, uncertainties, and dilemmas they face in their everyday lives. Their stories rely heavily on personal experience that often centers on a moment when they needed feminism, when they came to a feminist consciousness, or when they were able to overcome some personal obstacle. Each young woman’s personal experience defines sexism for her in ways that are affected by such differences in identity formation as race, class, geographic location, disability, sexual identity, motherhood, religion, family of origin, and school system. Findlen, editor of the *Listen Up* anthology, acknowledges, both in her own essay and through her choice of contributions, not only the influence of the antifeminist backlash against women but other factors that make young women’s experiences unique. For example, recognizing the effects of negative stereotypes of feminists, some young women are fearful of the feminist label, largely because of the stereotypical distortions that still abound (Findlen xiv–xv).

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2Amanda D. Lotz’s article provided a detailed discussion of the differences between third-wave feminism and postfeminism.
To challenge the misconception about feminism and resist stereotyping imposed on feminism, third-wave feminist’s initial rejection of their predecessors is easily understandable. In order to differentiate themselves from the Second Wave, these young women have to rename feminism, as Rebecca Walker claims, “I am the Third Wave.” The renaming is a strategic move to redefine feminism so that racism, sexism, homophobia, heterosexism, and classism all become integral to meanings attached to “feminism.” The third wavers use personal narrative to claim a theoretical position in which writers identify themselves as third-wave feminists or as members of a new generation of feminist thinkers. Third-wave feminists have engaged in such a practice using the personal voice with political comments to found a version of feminism better suited to their present needs. Consequently, in their personal narratives, a Third Wave in feminism is made possible by three main strategies: first, by contesting the meanings of the term “feminism”; second, by questioning the category “women”; and, third, by identifying a Second Wave (the constellation of cohorts, events, and actions that constitute the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States) as a “movement” of a homogenous group with shared gendered experience.3 Thus Third Wave signifies the meanings and methods of young feminists who have interrogated “feminism,” and it comes to signify a linguistic move to distance the object “feminism” subsequent to those interrogations. Thus, their personal narratives come to signify a strategic move to establish a feminist community, and thereby to distinguish themselves from what has become historically, epistemologically, and ontologically the Second Wave.

One might pause, however, to examine whether the third-wave feminist project is in fact a radically new one or is instead a new use of an old tactic. Feminist scholars such as R. Claire Snyder have observed how such a model of community-creation through the personal has its historical precedent in feminism in the highly successful and subversive consciousness-raising (CR) groups of the 1970s. She claims, for instance, “The phrase ‘the

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3Such a claim by third wavers is inevitably a misrepresentation of second-wave feminism, which is not monolithic in many ways.
personal is political’ still forms the core of feminism, and sharing personal experiences functions as a form of CR within the third wave” (184). Yet, this does not mean there has been a complete return to the early stage of theorizing the personal as political and to the assumption of a universally shared gender space. As a uniting force for women, second-wave consciousness raising has run into its own historical limitations. The practice of “collecting experience” has been criticized, for consciousness raising creates an imperative to generalize—and thus to universalize—from one’s own experience. In other words, in order to justify the use of personal experience to document oppression, consciousness raising requires an experience to be shared and thus leads to presumptions of universality. The original focus of such feminist groups thus led to an assumption of a unified feminist identity that excluded such historical differences as race, class, sexuality, and nationality. In opposition to the homogeneity fostered in the consciousness-raising group, third wavers argue that the ideal of such a feminist community exhibits a totalizing impulse and denies the differences within and between women.

Indeed, the concept of the personal, a product of historic, dynamic negotiations and contentions of contemporary feminist theories and practices, has reappeared in a new form. Stacey Sowards and Valerie Renegar argue that “Third wave feminist consciousness-raising has evolved in style, substance, and function in comparison to previous conceptions of consciousness-raising” (536). Siegel also notes that “if the Third Wave can return to the personal and the return to the personal enacts a return to CR, the result is CR with a difference” (68). It has been rendered different due to postmodern and multicultural ideas of multiplicity and difference (Siegel 54). But this “CR with a difference,” third-wave feminists would argue, already thrives within the movement: Gloria Steinem refers to the third-wave anthology *Listen Up* as “a consciousness-raising group between covers” (Siegel 86). Natalie Fixmer and Julia T. Wood conclude: “the embodied politics advocated and practiced by some young feminists may add additional layers of meaning to the intricate intersections between the personal and the political” (236). The new focus in third-wave feminist personal writing represents an attempt to better address the differences in women’s identities. The third wave is more interested in the differences among women and how those
differences shape their personal and political issues. It offers a new form of community where third-wave feminists connect, share their experiences, and unite.

They put a strong emphasis on how the feminist community might become more heterogeneous and recognize difference. Third-wave feminist texts such as Colonize This! focus on diversity as a primary issue, often observing how feminism has failed to include women of color and other diverse aspects of women. For example, Paula Austin explains her perception of what feminism has meant and why she has felt excluded: “I have felt left out of feminism mostly because it leaves out women who looked like my mother—traditionally feminine, of color, poor, powerful despite the impacts of oppression on her psyche. It leaves no room for women who find their power through a perceived powerlessness” (167). In a similar vein, Susan Muaddi Darraj explains how her experiences in a college classroom with second-wave feminism created a sense of exclusion:

I realized then that most of the women in the class were upper-middle and middle-class white women—and I felt like a complete outsider. Perhaps they could understand Friedan because her brand of feminism spoke directly to their experience. But it didn’t speak to mine. I didn’t view housework as a mark of oppression. There was a certain sense of pride placed on a clean, welcoming home, and both my parents had always placed value on it. (296)

Challenging the exclusiveness of the feminist community, third wavers attempt to extend into more areas women’s experiences in feminist community. Rather than constituting a unified, coherent feminist community, they argue for the construction of a diverse community that includes women with different, and even contradictory, relations to positions of power. Their personal narratives also raise consciousness about the diversity of women’s experiences in the world. Seeking to increase understanding and to embrace diverse feminist perspectives, the third-wave anthologies contain essays by writers who differ across a range of identity categories including social and economic class, ethnicity, geographical location, sexual orientation, and even gender. They believe that a wide diversity of feminist texts creates more opportunities for identification and helps build on the idea that there are many different kinds of feminisms and that many different kinds of
people are feminists. To create a sense of inclusiveness, these third-wave feminist texts deliberately seek to include diverse ethnic, social, and economic perspectives. Complicating any simple understanding of individual experience and its relationship to feminist communities, they acknowledge the complexities of the feminist community. In this practice, they thus encourage many women to read and know diverse perspectives that extend beyond their own.

**Revisioning Feminist History**

Personal narratives also have the potential of providing the kind of detail that is often missing in synthetic historical accounts. They can bring to light new or untapped perspectives on broader historical processes and phenomena that may undermine, refute, or contradict dominant views. The first-person narratives of young women not only reveal a woman’s process of self-discovery and identification as a feminist, but also demonstrate how young women attempt to alter the meaning and historiography of feminism. Their narratives, which testify to the multiplicity of female experience, have articulated a desire to encompass multiple perspectives in the history of feminism in the United States. There, historically, the women's movement has been marked as a succession of waves. The normative version of second-wave feminism has long been thought of as a single, unitary movement that treats sexism as the primary site of oppression in society. Yet, in telling the story of feminism of color, such an account alone is not sufficient. Women of color have been actively involved in every wave of feminism. In bringing about revolutionary social change in the United States, they have made, and continue to make, unique and irreplaceable contributions. Nevertheless, as Veronica Chambers notes, although black women have had a great impact on reconceptualizing feminist theory, their contributions have seldom been acknowledged:

As I continued my readings, I realized that in all incarnations of the women’s movement, black women were there. In the nineteenth century, there were black women who were both abolitionists and suffragists. There were black women in the sixties and seventies giving their time and effort to the struggle, demanding that white men and white women take them
seriously, [and] when white women talked about equality, we insisted that they mean [equality for] black women too. But as it was, at any table of discussion our specific issues were—and still often are—low on the list of priorities. Even among feminists, we are “minorities.” That simply isn’t good enough. (261)

Aware of the lack of attention to the contribution of women of color, many young women have argued for a revisionist approach in the writing of feminist history in the United States. They interrogate feminist history that has erased the early and substantial contribution of their feminist foremothers by constructing multiple histories. In revisiting the women’s movement, some young women have started to recoup the women of color who participated in U.S. feminism throughout its long history but whose role within feminism has often been ignored or erased. For instance, Amber Kinser notes how the movement’s minority leaders rarely receive the acclaim they deserve for contributions that were so central to second-wave thought and to various evolutions into a third wave (130).4 In her attempt to write women of color into feminist history, Mridula Nath Chakraborty also reminds us, “If this third wave is to be possessed of any lasting significance then it must remember and document the lessons of the second wave. We have to create the genealogies and histories of its counterhegemonic moments” (213). Such perspectives of young women of color are crucial not only for challenging the dominant conception of feminist history, but also for developing alternative narratives that can bring into view a page in feminist history previously invisible.

In earlier manifestations, third-wave narration is often criticized as theoretically insufficient and politically ineffectual. But in recent years—specifically since the millennium—third-wave narration has generated significant impact on feminist research and knowledge of production in academy and feminist activism. Academic feminists have attempted to ground the third wave within the academy, arguing that personal narratives are a form of theory—one that rethinks feminism, recognizes continuity, and embraces diversity (Heywood and Drake 2002; Heywood 2006).

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4See also a black feminist’s critique of third-wave feminism in Kimberly Springer’s “Third Wave Black Feminism?”
Personal narrative thus serves as a springboard for theoretical production and political practices of third-wave feminism. Linking personal experiences to the larger social context, many advocates have called for a third wave of feminism that is more politically conscious (Dicker and Piepmeier 2003; Gillis, Howie, and Munford 2004). Indeed, third-wave thinkers continue to redefine its politics and broaden its reach. They have engaged with social structures in response to a variety of local and global politics. Although not all feminists conceive third wave as a social movement, more and more feminists have started to see in it a potentiality that indicates future trajectories for the feminist movement: As Snyder claims, “While distinctly American, third-wave feminism potentially offers a diverse, antifoundationalist, multiperspectival, sex-radical version of feminism that could move American feminism beyond the impasses of the 1980s and 1990s” (192–193). I would add, moreover, that in an increasingly globalized world, third-wave feminism, though growing from American local experience, still offers value in global discussions. Indeed, there is some promising third-wave work pushing feminism in the direction of coalition politics with other women’s movements around the globe.

Historically, it has been women’s personal stories that have provided the evidence of where the movement needs to go politically and, indeed, that there is in fact a need to move forward. Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards can thus claim that the personal testimonies in To be Real are “the foundation of the personal ethics upon which a political women’s movement will be built” (61). While their (re)theorization of the personal is embedded within the critical feminist history of the concept, it is also intended to challenge and further develop it. Articulating alternative structures for diverse gendered experiences, the personal mode of writing practiced by third wavers provides us with a rich opportunity to reconceptualize the personal that engages with and subverts the dominant ideology of our time. As a rhetorical and discursive strategy, the third wave’s personal narrative has initiated a new space that is both theoretical and political. In the third wave, personal narratives, even if not directly connected to calls for action, can be used in ways to foster, rather than contain, complexity. Personal narratives allow for more complicated understandings of feminist identity, community, and history.
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