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“By Any Memes Necessary”: Exploring the Intersectional Politics of Feminist Memes on Instagram

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Note on the title:

"By any memes necessary" is the name of an intersectional feminist art exhibition that opened at Junior High Art Gallery, Los Angeles, on the 10th February, 2017, and was hosted by Instagram user @ka5sh, featuring memes by @gothshakira, @scariest_bug_ever, @tequilafunrise, @bunnymemes, @sensualmemes, and @versace_tamagotchi. The phrase is a play on "by any means necessary"; a statement popularised within 20th century social movement rhetoric in America. It is particularly remembered for its use by Black Panther Party leader Malcolm X in his 1964 speech at the Founding Rally of the Organisation of Afro-American Unity, in which he advocated that freedom for African Americans be won "by any means necessary". "By any memes necessary" can be taken to refer to the social and political struggles occurring in today's digital era, positing memes and social media as valuable tools to be used. The phrase is used in the title of this thesis with permission from @ka5sh.

Abstract

Internet memes are exemplary forms of user-generated content in the age of social networking and user participation. This study draws attention to the work of an intersectional feminist community on Instagram who make use of this platform to discuss their personal politics via image macro memes. The community is made up of femmes[1] who typically blend politics, pop culture, and a personal perspective into their content. This practice is identified as a contemporary feminist use of new media and is explored in relation to a theoretical reading of the current Third Wave of feminism as "embodied politics". The theory of "disciplinary power" by Michel Foucault, and connections between disciplinary power with systems of oppression and social media are also employed to construct an understanding of feminist memes as a means of embodied resistance to disciplinary norms. This study seeks to explore how Internet memes are harnessed as a feminist mode of discourse, and why feminist meme creators (or "memers") are motivated to use memes in this way. Therefore this research locates an intersection between digital culture and feminist use of new media. The research explores the possibility that Internet memes can serve as a creative and effective mode of feminist discourse in resistance to various forms of marginalisation - which occur both online and offline.

Keywords: feminism, Third Wave feminism, intersectionality, Internet memes, image macro, social media, Instagram.

[1] "femme" is a term which originated from queer culture to refer to queer women who have a "feminine" appearance. The term today is gender inclusive and can refer to cisgendered women, as well as other people on the gender spectrum who do not identify as cisgendered men, such as transgendered women, genderqueer, and non-binary folk. In this thesis, the term "women" is used in several sources, yet, without misquoting these sources, I aim to apply a non-essentialist perspective of gender and use the term "femme" in my own writing to talk about contemporary feminism.

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"Our world is a place where information can behave like human genes and ideas can replicate, mutate and evolve"[2]

~ James Gleick (2011).

"If you want to understand life, don't think about vibrant, throbbing gels and oozes, think about information technology"[3]

~ Richard Dawkins (1986).

[2] in James Gleick (2011) *Smithsonian Magazine.* http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/what-defines-a-meme-1904778/.

[3] in Ibid.

1. Introduction

Internet memes - the ubiquitous images circulating on social media feeds which have become hallmarks of 21st century participatory culture. Whether spreading misinformation, disseminating activist messages, or sharing pictures of cats, memes make up a critical part of the contemporary media environment. Converging with topics ranging from politics, popular culture, fashion and sports to entertainment, memes speak to a generation of Internet users for whom Internet culture cannot be thought of as distinct from broader culture and society. In 2016, memes undeniably intersected with Western politics, with the Twitter demonstration of #CatsAgainstBrexit, "Pepe the Frog"'s exploitation by the "alt right" movement, and the brigade of #NastyWomen rallying against the newly-inaugurated U.S. President. Today's digitally-mediated spheres are increasingly marked by a blurring of the boundaries between interpersonal and mass, professional and amateur, bottom-up and top-down communications (Shifman, 2013, 7). Additionally, with convergence between media platforms and content moving swiftly from one medium to another, memes have become more relevant than ever for communications scholarship (Ibid., 7). Once predominantly dismissed as trivial Internet humour, memes are increasingly gaining recognition within academia and beyond as a significant form of cultural capital - one which is capable of blending art, politics, digital culture and humour to engage digitally-savvy audiences.[4]

The 21st January 2017 saw a wave of "Women's Marches" take place in cities across the United States- joined by worldwide solidarity marches - to protest the inauguration of the nation's 45th President, Donald Trump. Women's March activists marched not only for gender rights, but for the rights of immigrants, Hispanics, Muslims, African Americans, the disabled, the poor, and the LGBTQ community. After Trump directed his "Nasty Woman" insult towards the then-Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton[5], thousands hashtagged the phrase on social networking sites to reclaim it as a source of power and unity. "Nasty Woman" memes remained popular online from October's televised debate until January's Marches and were subsequently widely adopted as a physical protest symbol [see Figure 1]. Other iconic feminist symbols and slogans were also

[4]The traditionally "low culture" aesthetic of memes and their inherent nature as "grass roots" cultural artefacts was recently recontextualised by the use of Instagram memes in fashion house Gucci's 2017 advertising campaign - a collaborative project called #TFWGucci ("That Feeling When" Gucci). The campaign intended to demonstrate Gucci's creative director, Alessandro Michele's "desire to engage with a wider creative community than that which traditionally locates around the world of fashion" (Thompson, 2017). Gucci blended Internet memes with art, commissioning international artists to produce imagery and "a new class of viral creators" from Instagram and Twitter to caption the images, including intersectional feminist meme creator @gothshakira (Gucci, 2017).

[5] *The Guardian* (2016).

remixed into modern socially and politically conscious activist messages. For example, in Figure 2, the 20th century "Rosie the Riveter" icon, captioned with the "We Can Do It" slogan, is reproduced into an image of an African American "Rosie" carried by two young Black girl protestors.

[Figure 1]

[Figure 2]

These examples demonstrate contemporary feminism in action; reclaiming patriarchal language to delegitimise its attempts to subordinate, and re-modelling feminism into a movement that is consciously inclusive of race and nationality, among other identity factors. Moreover, the *modes* by which these values are expressed are examples of memetic spread [Figure 1] and remix [Figure 2]. Hence, the Women's March signs reified feminist values by condensing them into simple texts which relied on intertextuality and humour to convey clear messages of unity, empowerment, and resistance**.**

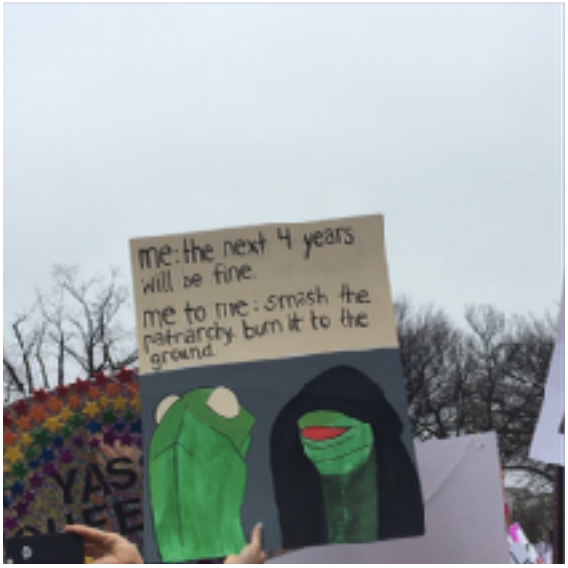
1.1.1 Image Macro Memes as Resistance Tools

An image macro is a common form of Internet meme which consists of text script superimposed over an image (Huntingdon, 2016, 79). Women's March protestors also reproduced online image macro memes from the digital space as physical protest banners [see Figures 3 and 4]. Photographs of these signs were then uploaded online and re-circulated in the digital space via social networks. The online tools of resistance became the tools of offline protest, and vice versa.

[Figure 3[6]]

The Women's Marches were one of the largest social protests in history and are clear proof that the feminist movement, enacted online and offline, is alive and well. From a communications perspective, the marches were also extremely telling of the convergence between the digital and the physical. Moreover, they demonstrated the emergence of the Internet meme as a shared visual and textual vernacular and a popular form of resistance rhetoric.

[6]The Statue of Liberty is anthropomorphised with the caption "screaming internally". Overlooking New York harbour, the statue carries a historical legacy for being the sight that first welcomed immigrants to America's shores and is a symbol of American freedom. The meme therefore expresses the imagined horror of the statue in response to Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy agenda.



[Figure 4[7]]

As An Xiao Mina - author of the forthcoming *From Memes to Movements* (2018) - states; *"*in a democracy, memes reflect the sheer diversity of opinions and voices of the people, from right, left, and centre alike…[and] in a democracy where the majority of people use the Internet, we should expect to see more memetic discourse on serious issues, as the artefacts of Internet culture spill over from social networking platforms and into our physical world and newscasts" (Mina, 2016). The 2017 Women's March protests demonstrated the convergence between memes and traditional means of protest communication. Furthermore, this online/offline media convergence is symptomatic of the ways in which digital culture continues to infiltrate how society engages with social, political, cultural and economic issues in the offline sphere.

1.2 Aim and Research Questions

This research aims to explore *how* and *why* memes are used as a mode of discourse by an intersectional feminist community on Instagram. I argue that, because memes are a unique form of communication, this politicised use of memes constitutes a new and understudied feminist use of new media. We can identify this usage of memes as one example of a discursive feminist practice, within scholarship on feminist new media practices (see chapter three). Hence, this study can be located at an intersection between researches on memes as a mode of cultural production and researches on feminist usage of new media, thereby identifying a research gap that connects the

[7] The "Evil Kermit" meme depicts the *Muppets* character "Kermit the Frog" talking with his nemesis look-a-like "Constantine" dressed as a Sith Lord from *Star Wars,* and is taken from a scene in the 2014 film, *Muppets Most Wanted* (*KnowYourMeme*, 2017). The meme format has become a template for framing an internal moral dialogue (Cady, 2016). Figure 4 adopts the popular "Evil Kermit" internet meme format to describe an internal conflict between feigning optimism about Trump's presidency and allowing oneself to be exacerbated by its actions and go for full resistance mode.

two. I aim to contribute both to media and feminist studies by connecting new media and intersectional theory, and drawing attention to a new mode via which intersectional feminist discourse is taking place online. As such, this aims to answer the following:

RQ1) How are memes used as a feminist mode of discourse?

RQ2) What are the aims and motives of the producers of feminist memes?

Digital ethnography is chosen as the methodological approach to address these questions because this study aims to gather in-depth qualitative data on a particular practice within the online social world. In the past, social worlds and practices have been attended to by sociologists and anthropologists with ethnographic studies of cultures, communities, and social networks (Pink et al, 2016, 103-105). Applying digital ethnography to the online social world engages with questions of identity, sociality, boundaries, change and community (Ibid., 120). A digital ethnographic approach is particularly appreciative of the ways in which people who participate in social worlds comprehend them and make meaning of them (Ibid., 122). Furthermore, traditional ethnography is used to make sense of discourse and explore the modes of production behind it. “Who speaks? who writes? when and where? with or to whom? and under what institutional and historical constraints?” are all questions that the ethnographer considers in her work (Clifford and Marcus, 1986, 13). Ethnography explores the “discursive aspects of cultural representation” and “draws attention not to the interpretation of cultural “texts” but to their relations of production” (Ibid., 13).

1.3 Justification and Motivation for Study

Social texts, like memes, are important to study because they constitute the raw materials in societal discourses (Milner, 2012, 15). As Ryan M. Milner has argued; “because memes are pop culture artefacts, they can provide insight into how such “everyday” media texts intertwine with public discourses” (Ibid., 9). As participatory cultural artefacts, memes provide a populist means for Internet users to engage with public discourse - a popular genre that allows for richer participation (Milner, 2013b, 2360). Memes also allow civil society actors to create entirely new discourses of their own.

This research builds on previous studies which have found evidence to suggest that memes are digital artefacts capable of enacting diverse means, and of wielding political power. With my own focus on intersectional feminist politics, I intend to provide a point of departure for future research

to explore how memes can be, and are being, used within a range of social and political movements, and as counter-discourses to hegemonic norms and sources of power.

This study also follows Limor Shifman's (2014) recommendation that studies on memes focus specifically on how memes deal with race, gender and class issues. In 2017, both memes and identity politics are salient features of the social web. In an era ostensibly marked by an upsurge in right wing populism within Western democratic societies, identity politics loom large in contemporary public discourse. Furthermore, undermining 21st century rhetorics of post-feminism[8] and a "post-racial society"[9], gender, class and race discrimination (particularly anti-blackness) continue to reveal themselves in juxtaposition with symbolic examples of social progress[10]. Within this context, social media continue to play an increasingly greater role in shaping social-political discourse. 2016 was lauded as the year that Internet memes became the "lingua franca of the modern campaign" that had begun "disrupting politics" (Chmielewski, 2016; Hsu, 2016). Moreover, regarding issues such as gender and race inequality, it is necessary to critically examine social media due its ability to conform, transform, or resist dominant discourses (Dickerson, 2015).

The memes that are the foci of this study communicate the particular and the personal, contrary to the typical association of popular online memes with a universal resonance commonly referred to as "#relatable". However, a more specific brand of "relatability" and less notoriety on the web should not render these discourses any less relevant by researchers. Rather, studying the voices of marginalised people involves looking beyond mainstream discourse to understand how people make use of social media in largely unseen ways that creative and unique.

"The personal is not universal, but the personal is still very important."[11]

The above aphorism is taken from a meme-centered talk by Instagram user and feminist meme creator @gothshakira at a 2017 graduate art history conference at Concordia University. Using

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[8] Post-feminism as an ideology is generally critical of feminism, but refers to multiple viewpoints - one of them being that feminism is no longer relevant. This could be viewed as more of an attempt to abandon feminism altogether based on criticisms of the movement which post-feminists share with proponents of feminism who alternatively strive to move beyond feminism's previous failings and create a better movement for equality.

[9] The notion that racial inequality in Western multicultural society, particularly the U.S.A., is no longer an issue. Advocates for the existence of a "post-racial" society point to the 2008 election of Barack Obama as America's first black president. Critics of the existence of "post-racial" America argue that structural inequalities affecting the majority of ordinary black Americans every day undermine these symbolic examples of racial progress.

[10] See Sara Ahmed (2017, 5-6) for a discussion of the post-feminist and post-race "fantasies" through which these systems of oppression operate.

[11] @gothshakira (2017). See reference list for details.

memes to convey both the political and the personal, this feminist standpoint diverges from the normative standpoint of generic digital culture, underscored by the belief that those who are marginalised by society deserve to tell their own stories, rather than be spoken for, or over.

In carrying out this research, I aim to bring these multiple personal perspectives into focus, which means that my methodological approach allows for this. Here, I follow Sandra Harding's (1992) advocacy for social science research to use standpoint theory by starting research from marginalised lives. Harding illustrates the issues with taking both an objective and a relativist approach. Historically, social scientific research has been informed by following the "normalizing procedures of institutions and conceptual schemes legitimated as value-neutral" (Ibid., 572). Committing to epistemological relativism has also had the effect of "defending the dominant views against their most telling critics" (Ibid., 573). However, as Harding argues, articulation of marginalised perspectives has provided powerful challenges to the adequacy of scientific objectivism (Ibid., 573). Therefore, she concludes, we should continue to research marginal perspectives, because "in order to detect the values and interests that structure our social world, one must seek to gain a causal, critical view of them" (Ibid., 581). These accounts thus offer a determinate objectivity and can help to develop new epistemologies.

My approach is also motivated by Lisa Nakumara's studies of digital production practices involving the creation of visual cultures by women and people of colour. As Nakamura (2008, 208) summarises, "despite its numerous shortcomings, the Internet allows "common" users to represent their bodies and deploy these bodies in social, visual and aesthetic transactions". These cultures "flourish in out-of-the-way spaces of the popular Internet, in online communities and everyday interactions" (Ibid., 209). Therefore, bringing them to attention means "looking more closely at the Internet and looking differently" (Ibid., 209).

1.4 Disposition

This chapter has introduced the concept of memes as artefacts of contemporary digital culture and as potential resistance tools against hegemonic power. I have also outlined the aim and research questions of this study, and explained how the outcome of these aims is relevant to studies of media and communications, online social movements, and feminism. Hereafter, chapter two provides a background on the contemporary digital environment being studied; memes, online visual rhetoric, and the ideologies embedded in these discourses. Whilst I broadly discuss memes as multi-sited

objects, I also include a sub-section on Instagram as the specific site of this study in order to set the scene for the context of my own findings. Chapter three covers existing literature on feminist use of new media, and highlights the different forms of social networking practices which have received recognition within scholarship on contemporary Western feminism.

Thereafter, chapter four attends to the theoretical framework which I employ to analyse my empirical material, in order to address the research questions. This begins with Natalie Fixmer and Julia T. Wood's reading of Third Wave feminism as "embodied politics" which I connect with an explanation of Michel Foucault's concept of "disciplinary power" in relation to identity-based systems of oppression. This chapter also contains a discussion of how memes can be conceptualised as resistance tools which "jam" the media. In chapter five, I attend to the methodological dimensions of the empirical study, and I discuss the choices and considerations related to digital ethnography and the research methods applied within this approach. This concludes with an evaluation of ethics, limitations of the study, and acknowledgement of my standpoint as a researcher.

Chapter six presents an analysis of the empirical material collected during the study using the theoretical framework outlined in chapter three. Finally, chapter seven concludes with a discussion to summarise how the findings from this analysis can answer the study's research questions, linking this to possible implications for media research and feminist research at a broader level. Here, I underline this study's contributions to the field and end by suggesting possible directions for further research to take.

2. Background: The Contemporary Digital Environment

This chapter elaborates on the definition of a "meme" according to previous scholarly understandings, so as to clarify the concept for the purpose of this research. I discuss a tendency for the memes of online subcultures to be steeped in ideology which often reinforces hegemonic standards while attempting to repress feminist and marginalised voices. Image macros are identified as particularly effective vehicles for condensing ideology into communication, and are pinpointed as the foci of this study. I also attend to Instagram as the site of this research with reference to previous studies on the platform, locating Instagram as a viable site for researching memes.

2.1 Defining Internet Memes

This chapter begins by discussing how memes have been conceptualised in academia. During the last decade, scholars have increasingly taken up memes as a focal point of study. As Shifman (2013, 364) notes, whilst enthusiastically embraced by Internet users, memes have been widely disputed in research circles - partially due to the ambiguous nature of the concept. One of the difficulties which has beset media and communications scholars in creating a comprehensive definition for "Internet meme" is the ever-evolving meaning of the term "meme" itself. Nooney and Portwood-Stacer (2014, 248) argue that this instability of meaning is enabled by hyper-speeds of transmission and growth of communities in the digital realm. Due to the ephemeral nature of digital content, the complete dissolution of online spaces and communities can occur at much the same rate as their growth (Ibid., 248). However, as the authors argue, the mismatch between the speed of Internet culture and the slowness of scholarship to keep up should not absolve researchers from tracing "the unfolding drama of Internet memes - and the systems, networks and communities to which they are germane" (Ibid., 248). Hereafter, I will outline the most relevant contributions to defining memes within previous scholarship in order to provide a conceptual basis for this study's purpose. I argue that these contributions are the most relevant to today's online landscape and the role which memes play in it.

2.1.1 Origin and Progression

The concept of "meme" was first introduced by the British ethologist and evolutionary biologist, Richard Dawkins, in his seminal work *The Selfish Gene* (1976) (Knobel and Lankshear, 2007, 201). Dawkins defined the meme as a "unit of cultural transmission"; a self-perpetuating cultural

phenomenon analogous to the "gene" as a replicator of biological data (in Nooney and Portwood-Stacer, 2014, 248). The etymology of "meme" derives from the Greek "mimēma" which translates to "that which is imitated". Dawkins envisioned the meme as a virus-like cultural artefact that proliferates by replication and mutation (Hahner, 2013, 153). Hofstadter (1983, 18) took Dawkins' metaphor of the "meme" as "gene" in a literal sense: "memes, like genes, are susceptible to variation or distortion - the analogue of mutation. Various mutations of a meme will have to compete with one another, as well as with other memes, for attention" (in Wiggins and Bowers, 2015, 1890). However, Hofstadter notes that memes, unlike genes, are media objects that also compete "for radio and television time, billboard space, newspaper and magazine column-inches and library shelf-space" (Ibid.). The science of memetics was developed during the 1990s to explore the transmission of memes using this evolutionary model. By 1995, Burman (2012, 89) writes, "the meme had become active and non-metaphorical", shaping language and thought. Dawkins' concept was expanded on by Blackmore (1999) who developed a definition of the meme as "a proper hypothesis of the human mind" (Foreword by Dawkins, in Blackmore, 1999, xvi).

In the mid-2000s, scholars began to apply the field of memetics to critical communication studies, with Johnson (2007) arguing that the meme can be "particularly useful for critical/cultural analysts interested in the seemingly superficial and trivial elements of popular culture." Communication scholars Knobel and Lankshear (2007, 199) describe memes from a literacies approach as contagious patterns of "cultural information" passed from mind-to-mind, which can directly shape the mindsets and actions of a social group. They add that these units of information can include such things as "popular tunes, catchphrases, clothing fashions, architectural styles, ways of doing things, icons, jingles and the like" (Ibid., 199). Knobel and Lankshear also established a definition of "Internet meme" as "a popular term for describing the rapid uptake and spread of a particular idea presented as written text image, language, "move" or some other unit of "cultural" stuff" (Ibid., 202). The authors identified traits of successful memes, including rich layering of cross-references to a host of popular culture events, artefacts and practices; anomalous juxtaposition of ideas to generate a provocative and absurdist playfulness; and the use of satiric humour to serve social critique (Ibid., 213-217).

2.1.2 Contemporary Definitions

Within contemporary popular culture, the term "meme" now refers metonymically to "Internet meme". Recent scholarship argues that today's understanding of a "meme" is now fundamentally different to the Dawkinsian definition. Commenting on the lack of a rigorous academic definition to align with modern understandings, Davison (2012, 122) defines an Internet meme as "a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission". Davison's typology of an Internet meme organises memes by their manifestation, behaviour, and ideal (Ibid., 123). This explains the manifestation of a meme as its observable, external phenomena; the behaviour of the meme as the action taken by an individual in service of the meme; and the ideal of the meme as the concept or idea conveyed. The three are interlinked as the ideal dictates the behaviour, which in turn creates the manifestation (Ibid., 123). Furthermore, Davison notes that when tracking the spread of a meme, it is useful to identify which of these three aspects is being replicated and which is being adapted (Ibid., 123).

Shifman (2013, 363) advocates studying memes from a media and communications-oriented approach "particularly in a time marked by a convergence of media platforms" (see Jenkins, 2006) and "when content flows swiftly from one medium to another". Shifman's work pays attention to memes within digital culture as a cultural genre in their own right. In a similar vein, Wiggins and Bowers (2015, 1890) identify the current understanding of a meme to be a genre of texts, rather than merely a unit of cultural transmission. They argue that, in this sense, memes (to be considered memes) do not necessarily need to follow an evolutionary model but constitute "something mundane that act as catalysts for cultural developments" (Ibid., 1890).

Scholars including Shifman have also developed a more nuanced understanding of Internet memes as a collective enterprise. Shifman (2013, 367) defines memes as "units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated, and transformed by Internet users, creating a shared cultural experience". Shifman also emphasises that whilst, ostensibly, they are trivial pieces of pop culture (2014, 6), memes encapsulate some of the fundamental aspects of contemporary digital culture, and bear the potential to shape and reflect general social mindsets (Ibid., 4). Rather than depicting the meme as a single cultural unit that has propagated successfully, she suggests defining memes as: "a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form and/or stance; b) that were created with awareness of each other; and c) were circulated, imitated and/or transformed via the Internet by many users" (Ibid., 7).

2.1.3 Units of The Self

Whilst recent research on memes as online artefacts is generally more applicable to this study, definitions of memes predating today's digital era can still provide useful descriptors. Despite newer colloquial meanings of (Internet) "meme", the meme essentially remains "a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation" (Dawkins, 1976, 192). Furthermore, Blackmore (1999, 231) argues that "memetics provides a new way of looking at the self" and termed the "memeplex" of the self the "selfplex"; imagining the body consisting of transmittable cultural units of information (memes) as well as physical biological units (genes). Blackmore's definition is useful to revisit for the purpose of this study, as I aim to recenter the social and cultural dimensions of memes into scholarship on their technological role in the transmission of content. In the processes of creation, distribution, replication, and modification, memes become channels for human creativity, consumption, and re-interpretation. Both as producers and consumers of memes, we embody these cultural units of transmission in our individual selves and partake in a collective cultural dialogue.

Blackmore argues that, because of our skill with language and our memetic environment, we are all repositories of vast numbers of memes (Ibid., 235-6). As the bearers of such cultural units which we may distribute to others, culture is formed - memes come to us through other people, and if we speak, write and communicate them, will reach yet more people (Ibid., 236). Moreover, it is important to view meme production and distribution as processes of meaning-making, as digital culture becomes increasingly embedded in everyday sociality, culture, ideology, and ways of thinking and seeing.

2.1.4 Consolidating Relevant Concepts

The Oxford Dictionary (2017) gives two definitions of a "meme": "1. An element of a culture or system of behaviour that may be considered to be passed from one individual to another by non-genetic means, especially imitation" and "2. a humorous image, video, piece of text, etc., that is copied (often with slight variations) and spread rapidly by Internet users". Hence, the former definition derives from Dawkins' original definition of a meme whilst the latter refers specifically to memes as digitised artefacts that share common characteristics and are spread via online networks.

A discussion of memes should recognise that both of these definitions as an "activity" and as a "genre" are conceptually linked to each other and both can apply to what is commonly understood as a "meme" today. As Wiggins and Bowers (2015, 1890) note, scholarship on Internet memes has

engaged with their import as both an activity and genre in social networks. For the purpose of this study, I base my own conception of memes on several key definitions including memes as spreadable units of information that are often remixed and repurposed, and a colloquial understanding of memes as combinations of words and text which complement each other to produce meaning.

2.2 Memes and Ideology

Memes are often labelled representations of society's "collective consciousness" (Tait, 2016). Certainly, from an over-arching perspective, historians in the future may be able to deduce much about the world today from popular Internet memes - particularly, our sense of humour. However, on a deeper level, memes represent various competing and contrasting value-laden discourses that differ between and among online communities. The majority of well-known Internet memes first spread through homogenous communities and social networks rather than through the Internet at large (Bauckhage, 2011, 49). Naturally, where memes are created and the various points that they traverse intertwine with differences in identity, community, and (sub)culture.

From the serious to the humorous, memes often assert one set of values and criticise others. Hence, memes offer a new means for users to distribute material imbued with strong ideological messages (The Economist, 2016a). Furthermore, research from University College London (2017) found that people who might be shy about expressing their own values and opinions often use memes instead. This lends memes an ability to communicate an idea or set of ideas privileging certain value systems in a simple, accessible format that seems less conspicuous to the viewer.

2.2.1 Disparagement Humour

The frequently humorous nature of memes can give false legitimacy to disparagement humour that targets certain groups of people[12], passing off these tropes as trivial jokes. Memes' propensity for transgressing social norms under the guise of irony and humour means that identity politics feature heavily as the subject of the joke[13]. Whitney Phillips (2012) argues that this channeling of prejudiced humour operates via "logic of lulz" (a derivation of "lol" or "laughing out loud") which

[12] See Shifman and Lemish; 2011 on memes and gender stereotypes and Duscherer and Dovidio; 2016 on stereotypic portrayals of Asians in memes.

[13] See Ford et al (2014) for a discussion of "prejudiced norm theory"; disparagement humour has potential to be "a releaser of prejudice" due to the uniqueness of humor as a medium for communicating derision of social groups (Ibid., 179).

affords participatory collectives a detached and dissociated amusement at others' distress (Milner, 2013c, 66). Milner (Ibid., 66) describes this as "the fundamental logic of trolling"; wrought with the "self-reflexive" and "absurdist". Memes that "troll" by disparaging groups of people disproportionately target minorities and women. A quick Google search directs to a stockpile of memes which are overtly racist, sexist, or by some other means discriminatory, without even mentioning those which make implicit assumptions about identity.

With regards to implicitly prejudiced memes, Dickerson (2015, 3) notes that memes have the unique ability to make commentary about race without overt references to race. Dickerson (2015) found that memes juxtaposing white and black sporting bodies implicitly celebrated white masculinity whilst African American sports players were emasculated according to gendered social norms. This content constructs a form of racial ideology that is representative of white backlash politics, reproducing dominant ideologies of race and gender (Ibid., 1). Memes often make casual use of stereotypes, reinforcing "othering" of minority and marginalised groups. Stereotypical racial images can be categorised as one form of environmental racial micro-aggressions (Williams et al, 2016, 425). As Sue et al (2007) argue, the cumulative effect of these micro-aggressions is to disregard the lived experiences of people of colour (in Ibid., 425). Williams et al (2016) also found that previous experience of racial discrimination impacted on judgements of race-relevant images online; those who had experienced higher instances of racial micro-aggressions offline were more attuned to transgressions presented online within memes. Furthermore, Milner's (2013c, 71) study of meme communities found that racial representations "privileged the constructed centrality of whiteness without much contestation from participants" (see also Duscherer and Dovidio, 2016).

The memetic representation of racial and gendered bodies in non-autobiographical production renders these representations problematic by appropriating marginalised identities and claiming agency on their behalf. Akane Kanai (2016, 8) addresses the assertion of privilege in memes with the presumptions of freedom to use, occupy and control bodies, converting them into homogenous resources available for self-production. Relations between bodies are flattened and simplified into free stock which one can rework and make one's own, "in the process strategically suppressing or forgetting historical meaning and difference" (Ibid., 8). This renders race and gender discrete markers of identity that can be made relevant or irrelevant through authorial intention (Ibid., 9). As Laur M. Jackson (2014) writes, black bodies in particular have been subject to processes of memeification by non-black internet users, stripping away their context and reconstructing their stories as caricature to be made into countless memes. These recurring patterns of social

commentary within memes reflect social media's tendency "to be complicit in the structures that make vulnerable targets comedy's most clutch resource", relying on jokes laced with racism, transmisogyny/misogynoir, classism, and ableism (Ibid., 2014).

Furthermore, Jackson makes an important point in reference to the role of memes in advancing respectability politics: the policing of members within marginalised communities to conform to mainstream values, rather than to challenge the mainstream to accept difference. The use of memes within these communities therefore reinforces dominant ideologies and essentialisms. As noted by Gal, Shifman and Kampf (2016, 1699), identity construction is a complex process in participatory media "which, on the one hand, enables innovative trajectories for subversion, while on the other hand seems to enhance conformity".

2.2.2 The Far Right

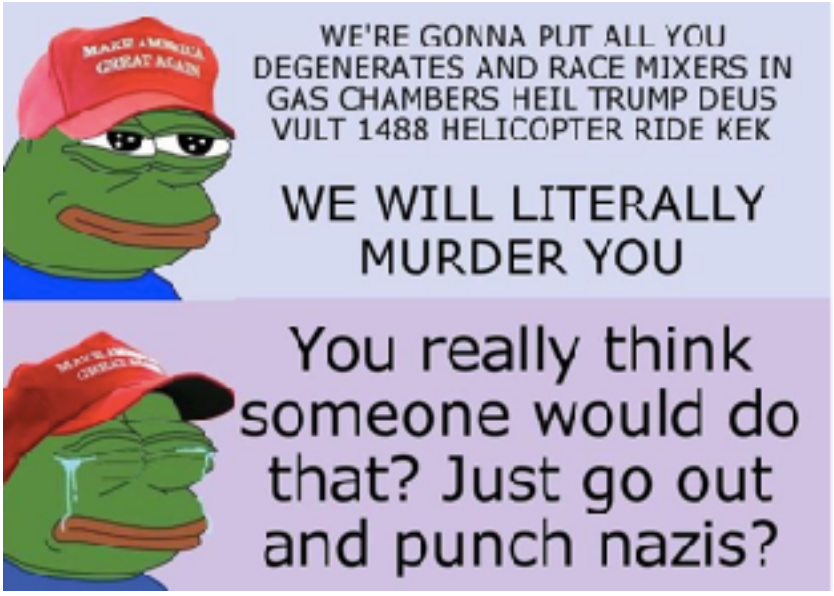
Originally, meme subcultures began as a more-or-less univocal set of white and male-dominated communities during the early era of memes circa the 1990s and early 2000s (Milner, 2016). From around 2011 onwards, online meme activity has developed into widespread, polyvocal participation (Ibid.), amidst the growth of online feminism and other online social movements such as Black Lives Matter. Today, memes represent a battleground between various ideologies. Recently widespread concerns have been raised about the use of memes to disseminate extreme racist, sexist and nationalist messages online. These groups are not only intent on spreading their own views but repressing the views of social progressives, women and minorities through an antagonistic form of argument that involves trolling and targeted abuse.

Burgeoning far right groups have capitalised on the meme's ability to work a set of ideas into an accessible format that can spread these further into the mainstream. Nationalist groups such as Britain First, Sos racisme anti-Blanc, Meninist and Australia's United Patriots Front (Broderick, 2016) have meme pages that serve as a gateway to far right sources of information. 2016 saw the considerable rise of U.S. "alt right" politics emerge on various social media platforms. A rejection of mainstream conservatism, alt right political values include white ethno-nationalism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, anti-feminism and homophobia. The modern alt right originated in places like 4chan which are hubs for meme creation (Roy, 2016). On 4chan, users can anonymously post an image to start a discussion thread and can comment on threads. The site describes itself as "a simple image-based bulletin board where anyone can post comments and share images" (*4chan*,

2017). Reddit is a social news aggregation, web content rating, and discussion website where registered community members can submit content, such as text posts or direct links. Users can then vote submissions up or down to organise the posts and determine their position on the site's pages. Taken together, 4chan and Reddit are vibrant sites of mediated public discourse. They each prominently feature a “logic of lulz" and extensively engage with race and gender identities (Milner, 2013c, 69). Furthermore, these types of participatory media collectives have, historically, been white, male and privileged (Ibid., 70). The anonymity of users also enables a type of freedom that can seem to benefit those with an intent to share racist, sexist or otherwise offensive memes (Davison, 2012, 132).

Alt right terms and ideas are disseminated through mixing hate memes seamlessly with more standard conservative fare. Memes and codes provide subtle forms of ideological communication, transmuted into implication and nuance, that are more difficult to define as hate speech. The frequently ironic tone with which these memes are deployed, known among users as “shitposting”[14] falsely cloaks this behaviour as playfulness without real world consequences. Yet this could not be further from the truth - pro-Trump supporters on 4chan rejoiced over their achievement in “electing a meme as president” (Ohlheiser, 2016). The visibility of alt right politics flourished with the use of memes, most notably with the now notorious case of “Pepe of Frog”. Pepe was formerly an apolitical humorous image on 4chan and 8chan before being fashioned into an ideological symbol of the extreme right, complete with Nazi uniform, Nazi flags and Swastika eyes. After Pepe’s image became inseparable from hate speech, the U.S. Anti-Defamation League declared Pepe to be a hate symbol. Alt right members celebrated this as a victory for the far right against “normies” and liberals.

[14] The act of posting poor quality images that are aggressive and/or ironic and are shared in order to troll, derail discussions and/or cause provocation.



[Figure 5. Example of an "alt right Pepe" meme]

2.2.3 Cybersexism

The memeification of political ideologies within male-dominated subcultures also breeds a culture of cybersexism the self-proclaimed "beta masculinity"[15] of "Internet geeks" or "memelords"[16]. The story behind Pepe's adaptation is bound up with this ideology - Pepe went from being a sad character, prone to bouts of humiliation, to spewing extreme racism and misogyny; an icon of the "beta rebellion" (Nagle, 2016). As Angela Nagle (2016) notes, this "new, net-bred brand of misogyny" draws from "a countercultural genealogy and identifies itself against feminism but also against social conservatism, political correctness, mainstream consumer culture, and most importantly; against hegemonic masculinity" in the traditional sense.

Women are viewed in the countercultural imagination as agents of conformity and "avatars of vain, mindless consumerism" (Ibid.). National decline and individual insecurities are blamed on feminised mass culture in the Internet age. When picking their targets for discrimination, Internet users within certain meme communities include femmes, alongside minorities. As a further example of this, Manvivannan (2013, 124) discusses the misogynistic trolling practices of 4chan's "Random - /b/" board which she argues indicates internal moral panic about its cultural exclusivity. The presumption of Western male heterosexual identity is invisibly imbricated into 4chan's subculture.

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[15] Traditionally defined as the opposite of "alpha" masculinity (physical strength, machismo, social and sexual confidence in real life) who do not conform to the typical socially constructed "masculine" norms. In Internet subcultures this refers to men who identify as geeky, social introverts, and are generally white and straight but do not fit society's idealisms of masculinity.

[16] "Memelord" is an Internet slang term which refers to somebody who is heavily invested in meme creation and sharing, commonly used by those on 4chan and Reddit communities.

These misogynistic trolling practices are “a reflection of the desire for subcultural preservation”, “acting as a subset of bigoted discourse all of which target users who violate anonymity and misinterpret irony, and attempt to “normalise” 4chan’s class habitus of established users” (Ibid., 125).

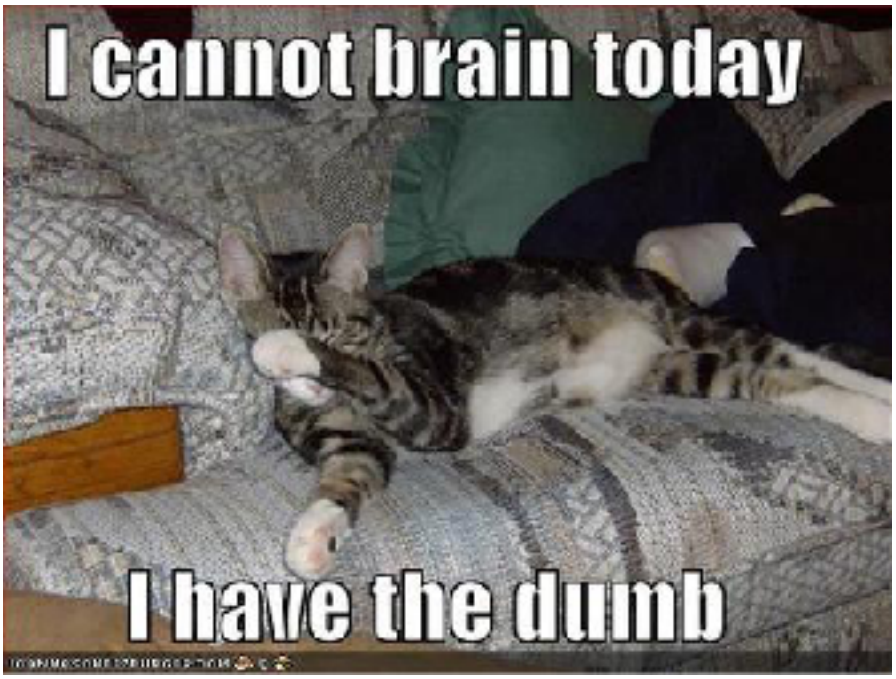
2.3 Image Macros and Visual Culture

Shifman (2014, 373) recommends differentiating between different meme formats to allow for a nuanced, flexible and dynamic account of what constitutes a meme. In following this suggestion, I focus my study specifically on image macro memes. These are still picture and animated GIF files extensively circulated, transformed, and incorporated into public discussion, which are especially prolific in participatory collectives (Milner, 2013c, 65). The background image tends to remain fairly constant whilst users continually modify the text script in the remix process (Huntingdon, 2016, 79).

The Internet is the world’s largest and most extensive vector for still and streaming networked popular media images (Nakumara, 2008, 204). Hence, the popularity of image macros is archetypal of preference of users for visual content on the social web. Lim (2015, 1) notes that this enables the “communicative fluidity” of social media which creates more seamless communication. The visual richness of social media allows users to make explicit feelings that cannot be articulated in words (Ibid., 1). Image macros can be easily produced and redistributed due to the ready availability of software necessary for their creation and distribution (Davison, 2012, 127). Image macros also enable creative re- interpretation and reproduction. Shifman (2014b, 340) identifies image memes as “modes of hypersignification” (wherein the code itself creates meaning**)** that can be conceptualised as “operative signs”; textual categories designed as invitations for creative action. As Wiggins and Bowers (2015, 1892) note, image macro memes possess an endurance that is likely due to the ease by which members of participatory culture can remix and spread them.

A case in point; Miltner (2011) identifies the appeal of “LOLcats”; images of cats superimposed with humorous captions that have become an archetypal image macro meme [see Figure 6]. Miltner attributes the continued popularity of “LOLcats” to an intersection of the textual and the social; specifically, the anthropomorphic humour generated by funny pictures of cats paired with

"LOLspeak" to express human thought and emotion. The author concludes that this visual meme medium is fundamentally changing the way people engage in online forms of cultural participation, creative engagement, community interaction, and identity construction (Ibid., 9).



[Figure 6. Example of a "LOLcat" meme from Miltner's (2011) study]

2.3.1 Stereotyping with a "Logic of Lulz"

As Milner (2013b, 2359) argues, image macros have become a populist means to express public perspectives and can be agilely applied to diverse ends. Milner's (2013c) study of race and gender representations within image memes on 4chan and Reddit finds that irony-laden communicative practices can both reinforce essentialisms and disrupt them, sometimes even simultaneously. Reproducing these discourses continues their circulation, and therefore may continue to normalise antagonisms and marginalisations (Ibid., 64). As Milner notes, the macro - in its play on stereotypes - might reinforce, or undermine them, as with the example of "Successful Black Man" (Ibid., 71) [see Figure 7]. In a sense, the humorous incongruity "works" because the first clause tricks the viewer into falling for dominant cultural assumptions and the second reverses the dominant trope - thus reminding the audience not to take all stereotypes at face value (Ibid., 71).

[Figure 7. Example of a "Successful Black Man" meme]

However, the very meme itself is so steeped in stereotype and arguably normalises the idea that if a black man is successful, he requires a modifier in front of his name to distinguish him from a "normal" black man (Ibid., 71). Therefore, invisible associations between blackness and a lack of "success" (defined narrowly and materialistically) are still embedded whilst the audience is assumed likely to see an "other" in "Successful Black Man" (Ibid., 71). Furthermore, it can be reasonably assumed that the creators and distributors of "Successful Black Man" memes are likely non-black, and the deliberate sharing of images of people of colour for their perceived entertainment value (whether participants would consider this racist or not) is inherently problematic. As Shifman (2014b, 348) argues, the "hypersignification" of "stock character macros" is located in the overt construction of stereotypes. The repeated use of one specific photo to represent an entire group (such as "Annoying Facebook Girl"[17] and "Sheltering Surburban Mom"[18]) forefronts the very idea of stereotyping by molding perceptions about groups into "readymade"

[17] KnowYourMeme (2011). "Annoying Facebook Girl". URL: http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/annoying-facebook-girl.

[18] KnowYourMeme (2012). "Sheltering Surburban Mom". URL: http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/sheltering-suburban-mom

templates (Ibid, 348). Therefore, the visual composition of image macros is thus central to a "logic of lulz" which facilitates their use in identity discourse.

2.4 Instagram and Visuality

Whilst memes have been approached thus far in terms of a broad multi-sited social media landscape, this study attends specifically to a community of meme creators on the image-sharing app, Instagram. The Internet is an exceptionally visual medium with individuals increasingly using images rather than text to express themselves (Marwick, 2015, 138). Visual digital culture is reflected in the numerous platforms dedicated to social image-sharing, including Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, Flickr, 4chan and Shots. Instagram is an extremely popular social media platform which functions primarily as a mobile application where users can share images from their phone and "like" or comment on other images.

Instagram was inductively chosen as the site of research following my own observations of feminist meme content specific to this platform. Instagram mixes features of various social media and online social networks, including; the ability for users to create content in the form of visual media, the option of social tagging, and the possibility of establishing social relations and social interactions (Ferrera, Interdonato and Tagarelli, 2014, 1). Instagram lends itself to understanding self-presentation and expression, online communities, and the mediation of every day life through images (Ibrahim, 2015; Jang et al, 2015b, in Laestadius, 2017, 576). These aspects make Instagram an appropriate site for conducting studies into culture, community, and discourse modes that occur within a particular social context.

Furthermore, Instagram's highly visual culture means that images frequently convey meaning and facilitate connections between users (Laestadius, 2017, 575). Accounts specialising in creating or reposting image memes feature frequently on Instagram accounts due to its inbuilt focus on image-sharing and popularity among young, digitally-savvy users. Popular meme accounts such as @fuckjerry (12.1 million followers) and @betches (5.5 million followers)[19] have a verified account status and feature promotional content as well as memes, proving that when memes gain popularity

[19] Figures correct as of May 2017.

they can be a monetisable platform and acquire “influencer” status. Ordinary users can “like”, comment, tag other users under memes, and repost memes to their own profiles, facilitating the circulation of memes within the Instagram network, and from Instagram to other digital platforms, and around the social web. Hu, Manikonda and Kamphampati (2014, 595) deduced that the most popular types of photos posted to Instagram could be roughly categorised into eight types based on their content; self-portraits, friends, activities, captioned photos (pictures with embedded text i.e. image macros), food, gadgets, fashion, and pets. Compared with other types of images distributed on Instagram, the popularity and circulation of image memes relies on a “low quality aesthetic” as grass roots produced and/or remixed artefacts. Studies have noted that photographic images on Instagram typically generate attention and “likes” with a “high quality aesthetic” through the use of skillful photography, filters, and photo editing tools **(**Marwick, 2015**).** On the other hand, memes can be considered different types of Instagram images because their appeal rests on the meanings conveyed through the image, whilst photographs rely on their aesthetic appeal.

2.4.1 Researching Instagram

Currently, Instagram has more than 500 million users and on average more than 95 million photos are shared per day to the app (*Instagram*, 2017). However, despite being one of the most popular and frequently visited social media applications, research using Instagram has been relatively limited compared with platforms like Twitter or Facebook. Additionally, research on Instagram has consisted mostly of quantitative big data studies that focus on textual content (such as tags, likes, and comments) and network relationships rather than the image and video content (Kaufer, 2015).

As well as its popularity, Instagram’s user demographics make it highly relevant to studies of Internet usage by millennial women and minority groups. Instagram use is particularly high among young people; user demographics from 2016 indicate that 59% of online adults aged 18-29 use Instagram (*Pew Research Center*, 2016). Research has also found usage to be higher among female internet users than males (38% female vs. 26% male) (Ibid.). As per U.S. data, Instagram is also distinctive for racial and social diversity of users - compared with Twitter, it has notably more black and Hispanic users, people making less than $50k per year, and those without college degrees (Duggan, 2015). All of these features make Instagram particularly relevant to explore how young people are using social media, and to find spaces where social, political and cultural identity shapes online practices. Instagram’s highly visual culture creates opportunities to study rich data in

qualitative research. This is particularly useful for gaining an understanding of a specific phenomenon where depth of data is needed, rather than an analysis of general user behaviour.

As far as I am aware, there are currently no studies on memes and Instagram and scarce literature on Instagram and feminism (see Olszanowski, 2014). Instagram is known for its role in promoting consumerism, celebrity culture and lifestyle aesthetics rather than social-political usage, which is reflected in the scope of previous studies. Studies on Instagram have leaned towards a focus on general user behaviour patterns such as selfie-posting (Moon et al, 2016; Ridgway and Clayton, 2016) and exploring the psychological effects of Instagram on users (Brown and Tiggemann, 2016; Holland and Tiggemann, 2017; Pittman and Reich, 2016). Furthermore, previous scholarship has found that Instagram's socio-technical affordances favour the reproduction of dominant ideologies, for example via performances of gender (see Tiidenberg, 2015, 1754). Marwick (2015, 137) argues that those successful at gaining attention in the Instagram attention economy often reproduce conventional status hierarchies of luxury, celebrity, and popularity, that depend on the ability to emulate the visual iconography of mainstream celebrity culture. Instagram is dominated by industries that have exploited the platform's popularity among teens and young adults; such as health, fitness, fashion, beauty, and lifestyle brands targeted towards younger consumers. This has given the platform its strong commercial edge, which, together with the platform's features like photo filters, has shaped user behaviours towards conventional standards being touted by businesses, marketing campaigns, and celebrities. I therefore feel that exploring areas of diversity, difference and resistance to societal norms is important to carry out on Instagram.

This chapter has provided a background to the empirical study by locating memes and Instagram within a discussion of the contemporary digital environment, where visual user-generated content constitute a popular form of communication. Internet memes are defined as a genre of texts which are shared and often replicated and modified by Internet users in the process. "Meme" can stand for multiple modes of cultural transmission such as a song, video, phrase or image, but often refers to an "image macro"; an image superimposed with text. Image macros are particularly potent carriers of ideology which have previously been used to forward normative ideals, stereotypes, and bigotry. The platform Instagram is predominantly used for photo-sharing but memes are also popular content, albeit arguably (in general) less subcultural than on sites such as 4chan and Reddit. In what follows I explore meme-making as a mode of feminist discourse on Instagram. Whilst this marks a

departure from previous studies on memes as well as previous research on Instagram and self-presentation[20], I position my research specifically within researches on feminist use of new media.

[20] See Tiidenburg (2015); Marwick (2015); Smith and Sanderson (2015); Sheldon and Bryant (2015); Moon et al (2016); Holland and Tiggemann (2017).

3. Previous Research: Feminism and New Media

The present chapter places this study within the research field on feminist theory and practice (3.1-3.2) and feminist use of new media (3.3-3.5). It is important to highlight that the literature I have included here focuses on the histories of Western (mostly U.S.) feminism, as this study concerns civil society actors in a Western context. Therefore, it is not my aim to give a holistic account of worldwide feminist movements. Given that this is a review of an extremely broad, diverse and complex movement, nor do I aim to present this review as a complete picture of the history of feminism. What I aim for instead is to provide a summary of feminism within a Western context, and to pinpoint the ideological and tactical shifts that have contributed to the debates, concerns and strategies of contemporary Western feminism.

3.1 A History of Feminist Action

"Feminism" is an umbrella term for an ideology that seeks to establish total political, social and economic equality based on sex and gender. The frequently used "Wave Metaphor" of feminism differentiates the movement's history and present into three waves. Whilst feminist activism previously existed (although yet to be defined as "feminist"), the "First Wave" is considered to have started during the 1840s. At the Seneca Falls convention of July 19-20, 1848 in New York, the Women's Rights Declaration stated, invoking the U.S. Constitution: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" (Evans, 1997, 93). This wave was characterised by the pursuit of suffrage and legal rights to give women equal status to their male counterparts.

This wave is almost always limited to the period between the Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention and the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, with the battle for women's suffrage considered its primary (sometimes its sole) focus. There now exists a critical portrait of the First Wave that focuses on leaders' efforts to limit suffrage and other rights to white, educated women. This view has led to claims that the movement as a whole was narrow in its goals and racist and elitist in its vision. In this version, the few women of colour who advocated woman's rights, most notably Sojourner Truth, are presented as heroic but unable to overcome the prejudices of their white counterparts (Hewitt, 2010, 3).

During the 1960s, feminists began to identify with a "Second Wave" that advocated for women's rights on a broader range of issues; namely, economic, educational and reproductive inequalities. The rubric gained popular currency with Martha Weinman Lears's article, "The Second Feminist Wave" published in the New York Times magazine in March 1968 (Ibid., 1). By the end of the decade feminists defined their politics as different to the politics of their foremothers. This vision of feminist waves was widely embraced by activists, the media and scholars; so much so that, in the early 1990s, a generation of younger activists had begun to define themselves the "Third Wave". At 22 years old, Rebecca Walker's article entitled "Becoming The Third Wave" for *Ms*. magazine in 1992 articulated a renewed need for action that resonated with the women of her generation.

Literature defines the Third Wave generation as feminists who were born after the 1960s and have been active since the 1990s. Third Wave theory puts a greater emphasis on the differences between women and the need for a movement that is diverse and inclusive. Influenced by post-colonial and post-modern theory, the Third Wave incorporates a deeper and broader extension of the Second Wave's critical view of cultural, social and economic oppressions. Self-proclaimed Third Wavers recognised the advances made by their foremothers but insisted on the limits of the goals and assumptions of Second Wave feminists. Spokeswomen for the Third Wave considered themselves broader in their vision, more global in their concerns, and more progressive in their sensitivities to transnational, multiracial, and sexual politics than earlier feminists. In most Third Wave writings, the Second Wave appears largely white, middle-class and narrowly focused on economic, educational and political access. In contrast, the Third Wave viewed itself as championing greater inclusiveness and more transformative strategies (Ibid., 3)[21].

[21] Activists have tended to highlight their distinctiveness from - and often superiority to - previous feminist movements in the process of constituting themselves as the next wave (Hewitt, 2010, 4). The vision of feminist waves is important to outline as the main mode by which feminism has historically been constructed by activists, the media and scholars, but it remains necessary to be critical of this construct. Nancy A. Hewitt argues that the wave metaphor presents the feminist movement as a chronological linear progression of three separate ideologies, when, in reality, they are made up of a complex series of trajectories that "do not supersede each other" but rather "coexist, overlap and intersect" (Hewitt, 2010, 8). Employing the wave metaphor is useful for tracing general changes within the movement over time, but should avoid a reductive analysis that assumes feminist waves are entirely separate with completely different and progressively evolving concerns.

3.2 The Third Wave Turn and Intersectionality Theory

The Third Wave introduced a greater emphasis on the "micro-politics" of gender equality, encompassing a much broader range of issues than feminism had addressed before. However, Third Wavers continue to voice previous concerns over violence against women, reproductive rights and disparities between male and female pay in the workplace. Influenced by black feminist writings and queer theory, Third Wavers also advocated more strongly for a greater consciousness of the different sites and lived experiences of struggle for women of colour, poor women and queer folk, and the need for a stronger alliance between oppressed groups.

The theoretical disposition of U.S. Third World Feminism has been historically marginalised by what Chela Sandoval terms the "hegemonic feminist oppositional consciousness" or mainstream progressive feminist thinking. Sandoval (1991, 4) argues in favour of a "differential" form of oppositional consciousness proposed by U.S. Third World Feminism to provide the vital grounds for alliance with other decolonising movements for emancipation. This form of consciousness can be described as "differential" insofar as it enables movement between and among the principles of "equal rights", "revolutionary", "supremacist", and "separatist" modes of consciousness that have guided dominant feminist thinking (Ibid., 14) and have thus far failed to incorporate an analysis of power relations that goes beyond gender relations. A "differential" form brings forth modes of consciousness of subordinated groups of the United States (of any gender, race, or class) as politicised and oppositional stances in relation to domination (Ibid., 14). Sandoval's pioneering essay on U.S. Third World Feminism as an appropriate discourse for the post-modern, capitalist society reflects the branch of post-colonial feminism that works to include the ideas of indigenous and non-white Third World feminists into mainstream Western feminist consciousness.

A more nuanced and reflexive feminist philosophy gained traction as Third Wave feminists such as Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak critiqued the idea of universal womanhood to undo exclusionary aspects of the movement. Feminists of colour such as Audre Lorde drew attention to intersecting patterns of oppression in their writings. Lorde (1980) called upon women to challenge the oppressor within themselves and embrace each other's differences: "for we have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house".

Emphases on multiplicity, inclusivity and self-reflexivity grew during the 1990s during a time when post-colonialism and post-modernism influenced feminist theory. An outgrowth of this was the rise of another theoretical approach of "intersectionality" that began to enter feminist academic circles during the 1990s and in recent years, has increasingly entered popular consciousness and figures prominently in today's feminism. The term "intersectionality" was originally coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, an American civil rights advocate and scholar of critical race theory, to address the intersections between issues of race and gender. An intersectional approach to studying identity and oppression considers the intersecting nature of an individual's identities and the intersecting nature of different systems of oppression. Therefore, intersectional feminist theory argues that gender is but one oppressed identity that factors in a complex hierarchy of intersecting identity categories which ultimately affects how an individual experiences oppression. This disputes the notion that women and femmes are a homogenous category who will experience sexism in the same way - accounting instead for other factors such as race and class which intersect with gender.

Contemporary intersectional feminism owes much to its origins in the Third Wave teachings of the 1990s, and the foci of multiplicity, inclusivity and self-reflexivity continue to figure in today's academic and popular discourses on gender politics. Today, "intersectionality" has been somewhat misconstrued as "the latest feminist buzzword" (Dastagir, 2017) which, at least, accounts for its popularity in everyday discourse, especially on the Internet. In 2016, Williams Crenshaw articulated the urgent need to incorporate intersectionality into discussions about both race and gender to recognise the existence of multiple intersections of discrimination: for "African American women, like other women of color [and] socially marginalized people all over the world…facing all kinds of dilemmas and challenges as a consequence of intersectionality" (Williams Crenshaw, 2016)[22].

3.3 "Digital Feminism" and Networked Feminist Practices

Today's feminism is characterised additionally by its relationship to technology, inciting debate over whether this change and the proliferation of online feminist activism should delineate a new "Fourth Wave" (See Munro, 2013; Cochrane, 2013). Cultural theory that came to be classed as "cyberfeminism" originated in the 1980s and 1990s, with Donna Haraway's (1984) and Sadie

[22] For a recent example of intersectional feminist advocacy see Ahmed (2017) c.9 on "Lesbian Feminism" (pp.213-234).

Plant's (1997) propositions that the influence of technology could redefine traditional gender roles and relations. In the 1990s, self-styled cyberfeminists emerged to challenge male dominance over new technologies (Reiche and Kuni, 2004). Stella Minahan and Julie Wolfram Cox (2007, 9) characterise cyberfeminism as "a construct developed to allow a voice to women who wish to participate in technology on their own terms" (Hamilton, 2009, 90).With the ubiquity of the Internet-enabled devices in today's Western societies, computer-mediated communication plays a central role in the organisation of social, political and cultural life (Castells, 1996; Van Dijk, 2012). In this age of networked sociality, online activism is a key form of participation in feminism for many young women (Smyth, 2014, 69; Schuster, 2013, 8).

The social and cultural imaginaries of technology and women have been strong drives for visions and promises of a "networked feminism" (Fotopoulou, 2016a, 992). "Networked feminism" refers to the use of online social networking sites for conducting feminist political action. Easy access, low costs to participation and flexible applications which can reach a large number of people mean that young women frequently employ new media such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs in their political activities (Schuster, 2013, 23). Networked feminism can be considered a type of online social movement which depends on the active participation of many Internet users within what Henry Jenkins (2006) identifies as an online "participatory culture". Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013, 36) argue that in today's online environment "niche cultural production is increasingly influencing the shape and direction of mainstream media". The following practices are identified by scholars as modes of networked feminism; including feminist blogging, "hashtag feminism", feminist organising, and feminist subcultures.

3.3.1 Feminist Blogging

Websites like feministing.com invite feminists to participate as consumers and producers of content in "open-platform community" format (*Feministing*, 2017). Feminist blogging, as a form of cultural media production, invites feminists to be active producers of culture, with the potential to have political effects (Keller, 2012, 432). Thousands of blogs are dedicated to feminism, or focus on individual feminist issues including abortion, eating disorders, media representation, and the sex industry (Hamilton, 2009, 91). With the rise of internet literacy and the proliferation of free and user-friendly software, especially in Western liberal democracies, blogs can offer the opportunity

for historically marginalised peoples to bypass and even challenge dominant discourses and privileged voices (Ibid., 87).

As computer-mediated-communication technologies, blogs capitalise on the long documented community-building potential of the Internet (Rheingold, 2000; Stavrositu and Sundar, 2012, 382). A shared sense of community is created as people participate as readers, bloggers, and both (Keller, 2012, 443). Via their embedded commenting function, blogs invite readers to enter into dialogues with the blogger and other readers, leading to the emergence of veritable blog communities (Stavrositu and Sundar, 2012, 372). Given their critical engagement with mainstream media, scholars have framed feminist blog communities as "counter-publics" (Shaw, 2009; Keller, 2012). Counter-publics are discursive publics that are based around texts. They are "counter" in that they differ from requirements of inclusion in the dominant cultural public, and are "defined by their tension with a larger public" (Shaw, 2009, 382). Their significance lies in their constitutive, transformative social properties. Counter-public discourses enable new political ways of being (Ibid., 382). These spaces can provide a viable means of participation that constitutes a new form of feminist activism typical of the Third Wave (Keller, 2012).

Scholarship has also identified feminist blogs as discursive political spaces that allow for personal introspection and experience to filter through engagement on sociopolitical issues. Hamilton found that feminist blogs can provide a useful medium for narrating both personal experience and political opinion (Hamilton, 2009, 87). Feminist bloggers, whether writing as individuals or as part of a collective, often combine individual testimony with political commentary (Ibid., 91). Blogs are centred on bloggers' self-expression, which is the source of their content (Stavrositu and Sundar, 2012, 370). Those who feel like making a contribution in the sociopolitical arena may consider blogging as a vehicle for expressing and honing their political voice. Those who are at odds with themselves may undertake blogging to express their angst and receive external validation. In this way, blogging serves at least two distinct classes of gratifications; agency-enhancing and community-building (Ibid., 382).

3.3.2 Hashtag Feminism

Designated by a "hash" (#) symbol, a hashtag is a keyword assigned to information that describes a tweet and aides in searching (Small, 2011, 872). Hashtags are central to organising information on

Twitter, and can be used to tag and search for topics on a range of social networks including Facebook, Instagram and Tumblr. Essentially hashtags are designed to begin a conversation that allows for easy and real-time viewing and participation from multiple users. Hashtags exploit the affordances of social networks to present a user-generated collaborative argument that blends news, information, and entertainment (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira, 2012) . This interconnected web of information provides an efficient, mobilising "electronic word of mouth" (Jansen et al, 2009, 2169) that lends itself to enhanced discussion, organisation, and mobilisation on social and political issues.

Feminist use of hashtags has contributed in part to the remodelling of how feminists define themselves in a digital era (Dixon, 2014). Popular feminist hashtags such as #YesAllWomen, #BringBackOurGirls, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen and #EverydaySexism have catapulted conversations about a range of gendered issues, events, and ideas into broad online discussions. Feminist use of hashtagging has risen above the limitations of not only women's mobility, but the limitations of being a feminist. Hashtag feminism demonstrates an ability to redefine social realities by combining new ways, and ideas, in forming communities for women who are seeking a place to express their beliefs, globally, with other women who share in their social identity (Ibid., 39).

3.3.3 Feminist Organising Spaces

Aristea Fotopoulou (2016a) highlights the use of social networks as tools for communication and organisation of activity. Her research on feminist and queer activist groups finds that digital networks aid community-building, provide spaces for organising events such as workshops, parties and festivals, and for organising the production of zines and online content (Fotopoulou, 2016b, 145). Many feminist organisations today use networked connectivity as a predominant means of communicating and organising which Fotopoulou terms "digital sisterhood" (Fotopoulou, 2016a, 990). Online connectivity does not replace offline communication, but enables a valued increase in intergenerational and "translocal" connections between members that facilitate offline practices (2016a, 994). Furthermore, networked feminism provides a more transparent, decentralised organising structure, that allows feminist groups to optimise their internal communications (Ibid., 995). Although Fotopoulou identifies the limitations of access to digital networks both due to "the material conditions of limited funding and shaped by the embodied experience ageing" (Ibid., 1002)

she concedes that digital communications offer increased possibilities for facilitating the networks, connections, and relationships that have historically supported feminist movements.

3.3.4 Feminist Subcultures

Scholarship also identifies the use of alternative practices within feminist subcultural media spaces. Rather than reducing the political to formal political systems, institutions and procedures, community and alternative media can provide equally valid spheres for political-democratic activities (Bailey, Cammaers and Carpentier, 2008, 5). Garrison (2010) notes the use of zines and music of feminists within the online punk community, arguing that these constitute forms of grassroots political participation. 'E-zines' or simply 'zines' refer to online magazines that are produced using digital methods and distributed digitally to the inboxes of subscribers. Through the medium of feminist zines, women make use of low-end or "democratised" (i.e. low-cost and widely available) technologies through which they disseminate knowledge and information about subjects such as feminism in local-national distribution networks (Ibid., 81). Garrison conceptualises networking as involving a 'technologic'; a particular practice of communicating information over space and time, a creation of temporary 'unified' political groups…[and] the combining of diverse technologies to construct powerful cultural expressions (Ibid., 387).

3.4 Intersectionality and New Media

Research has illustrated how intersectional theory grew out of Third Wave feminist emphases on multiplicity, inclusivity and self-reflexivity. The relevance of intersectionality in contemporary feminist theory can also be linked to usage of new media. Digitalisation and globalisation have broadened the opportunities for communication to transgress physical divides and enable pluralistic and transparent conversations on social and political issues. Some see the convergence of Third Wave feminism and the rise of "techno-culture" as feminism's saving grace, giving feminism an unprecedented global reach (Hamilton, 2009, 90). Technology has been hailed for its role in allowing feminism, and feminists, new voices and audiences (Ibid., 90). Numerous feminist blogs on the net (Cochrane, 2013) have widened and diversified the level of critical feminist discourse in spaces outside academic and formal institutions. Executive editors behind *Feministing* have

discussed how to include academic feminist concepts into the blog, such as intersectionality and performativity (Greyser, 2012, 837). This aims to import these ideas from the realm of academic discourse to a more "fun and accessible…new type of grassroots theory" that young women can use to inform their lives (Ibid., 838).

Whilst the blogosphere creates new fora for feminist networking and the creation of community, it simultaneously recreates old forms of exclusion and divisions within feminism (Hamilton, 2009, 86). Similarly, hashtag feminism has sparked conversations about a need for intersectionality in feminism, illustrated by the #YesAllWomen hashtag. In 2014, during the aftermath of a misogynistic shooting of several women on the University of California campus in Santa Barbara, the #NotAllMen hashtag was employed in an attempt to downplay broader generalisations about a culture of toxic masculinity and male entitlement that led to this particular act of violence against women (Jackson and Banaszczyk, 2016, 392). The #YesAllWomen hashtag was created as a response by feminists wanting to alert men to the ubiquity of violent masculinity and the problematic defensive nature of #NotAllMen in this context (Ibid., 392). Two days after this hashtag was created, the #YesAllWhiteWomen hashtag emerged as a challenge to the lack of intersectional analysis of women's experiences within #YesAllWomen conversation and to make visible the erasure of women of colour who had launched and popularised the first hashtag (Ibid., 392).

These events illustrate how hash tagging feminism into public debate can make visible underlying tensions between feminists such as a lack of recognition of intersectionality in popular feminist discourse. The #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen hashtag also expressed frustrations of women of colour with prominent "digital feminists" such as Jill Filipovic, Jessica Valenti, Jessica Coen and Amanda Marcotte, and their complicity in allowing Hugo Schwyzer, a white male feminist advocate, to put down women of colour (Kendall, 2013). Moreover, use of a hashtag allows real life gendered experiences to be shared in a connective dialogue - and this use of feminist narratology has provided an alternative voice and thus a stronger recognition for women's intersectionality (Dixon, 2014, 36).

The ability for social networks to dissolve physical boundaries between internet users in different spatial and cultural contexts provides new opportunities for sisterhood to transgress the socio-economic and cultural divisions that exist in geographically separate locales. Garrison's studies of feminist subcultures also show intersectional theory being put into practice using digital mediums.

Garrison defines alternative modes of feminist expression as “oppositional technologies”; fusing Haraway’s concept of the “cyborg” and Sandoval’s “oppositional consciousness” in the context of U.S. political culture and the proliferation of communications and visual technologies (2010, 387). In these acts of resistance and subversion, young women produce critiques that address their own and others’ experiences as women as well as their experiences of race, sexuality, class, and other forms of “embodiedness” (Ibid., 392). Garrison’s reference to “embodiedness” denotes the phenomenological route to meaning-making taking account of the constituent parts of our identities which shape our lived experiences of the world and reflections on it. As the author notes, feminism enables revolutionary forms of consciousness when it is understood as ideology-praxis that strategically invokes experiences traversing different locales and identities (Ibid., 395).

As well as opening up new ways to build bridges, the amplification of multiple voices in the digital space can bring tensions and debates to the surface. The Internet has enabled a “call-out” culture in which sexism can be “called out” and challenged online (Munro, 2013, 23). In an effort to draw attention to intersectional axes of difference, feminists remind others that they cannot and should not speak for others (Ibid., 24).This has become known as “privilege-checking” to make others aware of the ways in which their identity affords them freedom from the oppression experienced by others. In comment threads, discussion boards and on other sites of open dialogue feminists also “call out” behaviour deemed exclusionary or complicit with systems of oppression. The writings of Third Wave feminist Judith Butler have been instrumental in the “cultural turn” that has attempted to replace the feminism of the Second Wave and that now continues to influence feminist discussion on the web. A continued emphasis on differences within and between women, and online “call out” culture have given rise to new terminologies that attempt to ensure that those with a given identity are not spoken for, or carelessly pigeonholed. For example, the “calling out” of TERF (Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism) has been highlighted as a practice of contemporary intersectional feminism on the net (Ibid., 24). Munro states that today’s feminism embodies both the influence of technology and a continuation of the Third Wave emphasis on micro-politics and challenging the culture of sexism as it appears in the everyday rhetoric and in the media (Ibid., 23).

3.5 Memes as a Feminist Mode of Discourse

As previously discussed, this is the first study to conduct an in-depth analysis of usage of Internet memes as a tool for discursive feminist practice. This chapter has so far noted the prevalence of blogs, hashtags, group organisation via social networks, and alternative media and subcultures in studies of feminism and new media. However research is limited in its discussion of memes as feminist tools of communication. Furthermore, media and communications scholarship has identified the instrumental use of memes for other social justice issues such as the Occupy movement (see Huntingdon, 2016; Milner, 2013) and resistance to government internet censorship (see Mina, 2014), yet memes have not yet been adequately considered as gendered technological objects. In spite of this, there is suggestive evidence of the meme's viability for networked feminism. Two examples of studies outlined here invite further research into the meme as feminist praxis.

Carrie Rentschler and Samantha Thrift (2015) illustrate the meme's utility in generating a dynamic heterogenous discourse around a feminist issue. In 2012, memes were used to construct networks of feminist critique following a comment made by former Republican presidential candidate, Mitt Romney, during a televised debate. Responding to a question posed by voter Katherine Fenton regarding women's pay inequity, Romney replied: "I went to a number of women's groups and said: "Can you help us find folks", and they brought us whole binders full of women" (Rentschler and Thrift, 2015, 330). Romney's phrasing intended to signify the compilation of women's résumés for prospective candidacy in state cabinet positions submitted to him as Governor of Massachusetts (Ibid., 330) but was widely perceived as demeaning language about women and a wholly unsatisfactory answer to the question. Hence, the Internet witnessed a near-instantaneous amplification of an extensive network of feminist political critique to denounce Romney's gaffe through the creation and spread of a "Binders Full of Women" meme (Ibid., 330).

The authors argue that networking and distribution capacities of social media platforms can cultivate critique and models of political agency for practicing feminism through meme production and propagation (Ibid., 329). Through key forms of visual parody and satirical commentary, "Binders Full of Women" became a highly visible, and spreadable, feminist meme (Ibid., 330). As participatory forms of media-making and sharing, memes provide a unique vantage point from

which to conceptualise some of the affective, technological and cultural politics of digital feminisms and their contemporary modes of action (Ibid., 331).

Additionally, a psychological study of responses to the popular "Feminist Ryan Gosling" meme indicates the potential for memes to promote feminist ideals. "Feminist Ryan Gosling" memes are composed of an image of the Canadian actor next to the words "Hey girl" and a feminist message. The study found that exposure to "Feminist Ryan Gosling" memes increased audience endorsement of specific feminist beliefs (Williamson, Sangster and Lawson, 2014). It also indicated support for the premise that popular Internet memes could serve as "persuasive device for relaying ideological information" (Ibid.).

This chapter has provided a historical overview of the feminist movement and identifies the current feminism as the third, or sometimes referred to as the fourth wave. Contemporary feminism includes the use of offline and online activism; what scholars have defined as practices within "networked feminism". The intersection of new media with feminism has resulted in feminism being articulated new forums, and, via various technological capacities, has lifted the concerns of (particularly young) feminists of the Third Wave, into focus. These practices can be enumerated into four modes by which feminists carry out discursive political activism; feminist blogging, feminist hashtagging, feminist use of social networks as organising spaces, and creation of feminist subcultures. Finally, I have noted that previous studies (albeit the lack thereof) which indicate the potential of memes as a feminist mode of discourse. Due to the distinctive and unique properties of memes, I propose that they be conceptualised as a separate mode of discourse within research on feminism and new media.

4. Theoretical Framework: Power and Resistance in Discourse

In this chapter I introduce the theoretical approaches I make use of to analyse the empirical material collected from this study. My study occupies a position at the intersection between media and communications studies, social movement studies, feminist studies, and (digital) ethnographic research; the modus operandi of cultural anthropology. Therefore I will be relying on an analytical approach that makes use of theory from various disciplines which have been linked together to construct this framework. I have employed an inductive methodological approach to draw out key themes from the empirical material, which has guided the choice of theory that I present here.

I first discuss communication scholars Natalie Fixmer and Julia T. Wood's (2005) reading of the Third Wave as a form of "embodied politics". Fixmer and Wood base these theoretical findings on their reading of three key Third Wave texts, locating these principles within a late 20th century understanding of power and discourse. Applying Fixmer and Wood's understanding of Third Wave feminism to the empirical material I illustrate the ways in which intersectional feminist memes reify "embodied politics". Fixmer and Wood identify the similarities between French philosopher, Michel Foucault's concept of "disciplinary power" and the Third Wave feminist approach to power as "embodied politics". Hence, secondly, I elaborate on Foucault's thesis on power and resistance, and apply the notion of power as disciplinary to the invisible, intricate and intersecting nodes of power relations exercised in systems of oppression to inform an intersectional analysis of oppression. Because disciplinary power operates at not one, but in many sites, it fundamentally differs from a Marxist analysis by locating power within axes of gender, race and sexuality, as well as class. Thirdly, I bring the aforementioned elements of this framework together to construct an analysis of resistance to these forms of power, using the tools of social media, specifically memes. Memes with a socially and politically conscious edge are derivatives of "culture jamming" in their subversion of mainstream media to contest dominant ideologies using humour and remix. Using culture jamming tactics, memes proffer possibilities for user collaboration to construct oppositional forms of power to hegemonic discourses.

4.1 The "Embodied Politics" of the Third Wave

I employ a reading of Third Wave feminism as "embodied politics" by Natalie Fixmer and Julia T. Wood to analyse how feminist memes are examples of "doing feminism" online that reifies Third Wave principles within the online social world. The three key principles outlined by the authors demonstrate the importance of intersectionality theory in Third Wave feminist thought, and create room for resistance strategies to disciplinary power, paying particular attention to the multiple and intersecting forms of oppression that can characterise femme experiences. In this explanation I include supportive references for Fixmer and Wood's ideas that have been drawn from my own reading around literature on Third Wave feminism.

Fixmer and Wood (2005, 235) define "embodied politics" as "personal acts that aim to provoke change by exercising and resisting power in local sites". Their framework identifies three forms of embodied politics as: "building coalitions to forge an inclusive solidarity"; "redefining identity by engaging differences, ambiguities and multiplicities among women" and "enacting personal resistance" (Ibid.). The authors engaged in close readings of three key feminist texts: *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation* (Findlen, 2005); *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* (Walker, 1995); and *Colonise This! Young Women of Colour on Today's Feminism* (Hernández and Rehman, 2002) (Ibid., 236). From this they deduce that the narratives of key Third Wave anthologies actively reconceptualised "the personal is political" for the late 20th century to emphasise inclusivity, multiplicity and everyday politics.

Foucault's conception of disciplinary power is conceptually linked and contextually grounded in the growth of Third Wave feminist principles. Fixmer and Wood argue that "Foucault's work seems particularly appropriate to understanding the goals and politics of a generation that came of age in an era infused with postmodern awareness of contingent subjectivities, decentralised modes of resisting power and locally situated practices" (Ibid., 245). Employing the notion of disciplinary power takes into consideration how Third Wave feminism has been influenced by postmodernism and poststructuralism; viewing everyday personal acts of resistance as a key part of emancipatory politics.

4.1.1 "Redefining Identity by Engaging Differences, Ambiguities and Multiplicities Among Women"

Third Wave feminism is concerned not solely with gender inequality, but takes multiple, contradictory and interlocking systems of oppression as "the starting point for third wave politics" (Ibid., 238). Whilst feminism's Second Wave recognised differences between women, Third Wave theory places these differences at the centre of the feminist movement, and embraces these complexities and ambiguities over traditional constructs and ideas. As Fixmer and Wood argue, "an adequate understanding of identity entails recognising multiple, intersecting, and sometimes contradictory facets of subjects that defy modernist categories" (Ibid., 239). Embracing contradictions and fluidity is seen as fostering diversity and as a means of resisting the normalisation and problematisation of identity, much in the spirit of performance theories and queer theorists (Archer Mann and Huffman, 2005, 71). Allowing for contradictions within identities rejects the existence of fixed and separate identity categories and envisions liberation in a resistance to the dominance of these constructs. Similarly, Heywood and Drake (1997, 7) discuss how the new generation embraces "hybridity", or what they refer to as "the lived messiness" of the Third Wave.

Embracing contradiction means acknowledging both our oppressions *and* privileges, and the role we play in the oppression of others. Third wave feminism teaches that honoring differences and accepting the contradictions that exist is essential to maintaining an inclusive, strong and cohesive movement (Evans and Bobel, 2007, 216).This necessarily precludes that while feminists actively resist patriarchy and other systems of domination, they also take a self-reflexive and critical approach to their own and each other's feminism. The Third Wave highlighted a need for feminists to examine the forms of oppression and discrimination that they had themselves internalised (Archer Mann and Huffman, 2005, 60).

Furthermore, Third Wave feminism favours an uncertainty of knowledge that flows from multiple perspectives over continued adherence to grand narratives (Zimmerman et al, 2009, 79). Inclusion of multiple perspectives and cross-cultural communication can lead to a rejection of dominant ideologies and an openness to the dynamic creation of truth (Ibid., 79). This principle of "redefining identity" demonstrates the influence of intersectionality theory that has been inextricably linked to the Third Wave (Evans, 2016). Conceptualising the individual as housing multiple subjectivities

also points to the influence of postmodern theory; the decentering and deconstructing of dominant discourses met by questioning the power relations and social norms that undergird them form an integral part of Third Wave politics (Fixmer and Wood, 2005; Archer Mann and Huffman, 2005; Evans and Bobel, 2007; Siegel and Baumgardner, 2007; Zimmerman et al, 2009).

4.1.2 "Building Coalitions to Forge an Inclusive Solidarity"

Fixmer and Wood (2005, 240) argue that Third Wave feminism pays particular attention to "building coalitions in order to fashion a kind of solidarity that incorporates differences while transcending identity politics". Inclusion is deemed essential to building movement strength and solidarity, and appealing to those for whom the feminist label felt too narrow and restrictive (Evans and Bobel, 2007, 215). The authors note that Third Wavers have moved from beyond a politics of identity towards a politics of "identification" - "in which political actors identify with particular political causes and mobilise to achieve particular political goals" (Anna Bondoc, 1995, 304, in Fixmer and Wood, 2005, 241). Third Wave politics incorporate identities of difference as a starting point for activism whilst moving beyond identity as the basis for identification, connection and collectivity. Third Wave feminism asks questions about what constitutes a "coalition" and on what basis a "community" comes into being (Heywood and Drake, 1997, 50). Heywood and Drake quote intersectional black feminist bell hooks in her articulation that "rather than thinking we would come together as "women" in an identity-based bonding, we might be drawn together by a *commonality of feeling*" (hooks, in Ibid., 50).

Fixmer and Wood (2005, 240) argue that building coalitions "helps third wavers resist tendencies to ignore or devalue people who belong to groups other than their own". They emphasise making these coalitions inclusive of all kinds of women, "and perhaps particularly those on the margins" because resistance to interrelated oppressions must be intersectional itself (Ibid., 241). This allegiance to inclusive solidarity and politics embodies Ernest Laclau's belief that "to engage only the struggles of one's own specific group is to be politically ineffective" (Ibid., 242). Forging an inclusive solidarity means listening to the perspectives of those who have vastly different experiences of oppression. The narratives contained within Third Wave writings offer a new lens for critical thinking by elevating deeply personal experiences which may be completely alien to the reader (Zimmerman et al, 2009, 83). As Yu (2011) notes, feminists of colour such as Chela Sandoval,

Barbara Smith, Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldua, Audre Lorde, Maxine Hong Kingston, bell hooks, Alice Walker, and many others, document their lives to create new knowledge of their experiences and counter misrepresentations.

Archer Mann and Huffman (2005, 68) emphasise the influence of feminist postcolonial theory on the Third Wave. Taking a macro-structural and oppositional analysis of oppression allows for feminists to focus on the experiences and struggles of women in non-Western cultures. This aims to broaden the scope of feminism to be inclusive of peoples, ideologies and socio-cultural factors from all societies, and to reduce the ethnocentric bias that comes from using a Western approach. This principle is heavily influenced by intersectionality theory as it concentrates on both "interlocking facets of identity and the interlocking nature of oppressions" (Fixmer and Wood, 2005, 242).

4.1.3 "Enacting Personal Resistance"

Fixmer and Wood (2005, 242) cite "a personal, bodily resistance to oppressive ideologies as a critical form of embodied politics of the third wave". This involves resistance being enacted on a personal level, in the public spaces of every day life and in response to the subtle ways that oppression manifests whilst evading structural censure or control. The writers of Third Wave anthologies argue that "the political is inevitably tied to everyday life" and their stories elucidate the injustices that occur in the "tiny, everyday moments" (Ibid., 243). As the authors argue this involves enacting resistance in public spaces; workplaces and schools, communities of strangers, friends, and families (Ibid., 243).

Fixmer and Wood note that enacting deeply "personal" forms of resistance often means politicising the body as a means towards liberation from patriarchal and colonial control. For different women, this means different things. For example, the authors invoke Abra Fortune Chernik (1995, 81) who explicitly links social constructions of female beauty to eating disorders, stating that, "gaining weight and getting my head out of the toilet bowl was the most political act I have ever committed" (Ibid., 243). Culture and sexuality became major sites of struggle for many recruits to feminism in the 1980s and 1990s (Heywood and Drake, 1997, 4). Self-help groups, feminist therapies, and feminist spirituality were also arenas of growth that suggested an increasing focus on personal transformation as a means of social change (Archer Mann and Huffman, 2005, 86).

Enacting personal resistance reflects a strong strain of individualism within Third Wave theory, as well as the society-level view that comes from analysing macro-level structures. Heywood and Drake (1997, 11) argue that "the ideology of individualism is still a major motivating force in many third wave lives". Despite their suggestion that this may be counter-productive to the movement, an individualistic perspective can encourage feminists to acknowledge the individual role they have to counter oppression in their everyday lives. In other words, the appreciation that, "a feminist is not just someone who envisions a different world but someone who creates a life that will change it" (Darice Jones, 2002, 312-313, in Fixmer and Wood, 2005, 243).

This informs an understanding of political activism as local, with global connections and consequences (Zimmerman et al, 2009, 79). Fixmer and Wood (2005, 244) note that Third Wavers link localised struggles to broader, structural changes. For example, Lisa Bowleg (1995, 52) engages in political activism by "speaking openly and honestly with my family and friends" to initiate a dialogue on important issues (Ibid., 244). The vision of an inclusive, interconnected, contradictory feminist movement simulates action that falls outside a conventional definition of feminism (Evans and Bobel, 2007, 217). Acts of everyday feminism are "daily acts of resistance that may or may not be enacted under the feminist banner"; including "having conversations about marginalisation, oppression and privilege" (Ibid., 217).

4.2 Disciplinary Power

Power, Foucault argues, is not a unitary concept, and he rejects a simplistic definition of power as hierarchical. Rather, Foucault argues that modern society is defined by systems of power which manifest insidiously so that subjects will discipline themselves, without the need for external enforcement. This "disciplinary power" is applied "by techniques of surveillance, normalizing sanctions, and the panoptic organization of punitive institutions" (Fontana and Bertani, 2003, 273). Aside from institutional reinforcement, these "multiple forms of domination" are also enacted by "subjects in their reciprocal relations" and in "the multiple subjugations that take place and function within the social body" (Foucault, 1976, 27, in Ibid., 25).

Foucault's theorising of disciplinary power begins with the prison system which he extends to the rest of society. In 1973, Foucault spoke of a form of "supervision-punishment" in free society; "a system of permanent checking of individuals" which resembles "a permanent test, but with no final point…an inquiry, but before any offence" (Foucault, 1973, in Harcourt, 2015, 196). This test makes it possible to regulate subjects' behaviour because it "permits a control and pressure at every moment, that makes it possible to follow the individual in each of his steps, to see if he is regular or irregular, orderly or dissipated, normal or abnormal" (Ibid., 196). This, Foucault argues, is what makes modern society "a disciplinary society" as we no are no longer ultimately commanded by judicial power, but by the diffusion of power "in a daily, complex, deep punitive system that moralizes the judicial" (Ibid, 196).

Foucault also argued that another central exercise of disciplinary power is through "normalization, habit and discipline" (Ibid., 237). He argues that, "since the eighteenth century there has been a constant multiplication, refinement, and specification of apparatuses for manufacturing disciplines, for imposing coercions, and for instilling habits" (Ibid., 237) These systems of discipline take "the insidious, quotidian, habitual form of the norm", and in this way they become hidden as power, appearing instead as reality (Ibid., 240). When power shapes the appearance of reality, it also shapes what we conceive of as "knowledge". For Foucault, power and knowledge are intimately connected; "power produces knowledge…power and knowledge directly imply one another" and where there is one, there will be the other (Foucault, 1975, 27, in Schrift, 2013, 141).

Foucault posits that we should think of power as a strategy, not a property; as something exercised rather than possessed; and as existing in relations rather than in things or persons (Schrift, 2003, 141). Disciplinary power circulates, and "functions only when it is part of a chain" (Foucault, 1976, in Fontana and Bertani, 2003, 29). "Power functions. Power is exercised through networks, and individuals do not simply circulate in these networks; they are in a position to both submit to and exercise this power" (Foucault, 1976, in Ibid., 29). Hence, resistance to disciplinary power can be enacted in the local sites where this power appears - disciplinary power can subject bodies to render them passive, but also to render them active. Foucault emphasises "the strictly relational character of power relationships. Their existence depends upon a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handles in power relations…[and] are present everywhere in the power network." (Foucault, 1976, in Hurley, 1981).

4.2.1 Systems of Oppression

Here, I connect Foucault's notion of a power that is "disciplinary" to axes of structural oppression and marginalisation. According to Foucault, power relations are fundamental to social relations and our knowledge of the world and ourselves. Race and gender scholars have expanded on Foucault's genealogies of power and knowledge creation because his ideas challenge traditional ways of thinking about how power is exercised on populations. Disciplinary power has become a significant resource for feminist theory by conceptualising power as exercised rather than possessed, as circulating through relations between individuals and institutions; providing a more nuanced understanding of how domination operates. This conception of power also highlights the possibility for resistance to occur at the micro-political level where power is exercised. Extrapolated to modern society, Foucault's idea of power as "disciplinary" results in the increased surveillance of individuals by those with greater authority, so that individuals choose to modify their own behaviour without the need for external enforcement. Foucault adds to this discussion the notion of "hierarchical observation", which he suggests occurs when the power to make decisions or control behaviours is affixed onto certain individuals, and compliance is affixed onto others (Foucault, 1975, 170, in Schrift, 2013, 145).

Established feminist scholar Judith Butler expands on Foucault's notion of disciplinary power to argue that traditional ideas about gender and identity are based on a set of norms that regulate how gender is performed. Butler (1999, 25) argues that gender and sex, rather than being ontological realities, are discursive constructs that produce certain kinds of bodies and subjectivities; insisting that gender is: "a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame" that have come to be seen as natural ways of being. These "acts" of performing gender are not products of the subject's free will but demonstrate regulation of the subject according to normalisation of gender roles and requirements, and are therefore "disciplinary". According to Butler, subjects are compelled to enact the compulsory norms of gender in order to exist as viable social subjects.

Benjamin Baez (2000, 339), following Foucault, argues that racism takes on a disciplinary quality by its diffuse, scattered and invisible nature which regulates behaviour so pervasively and silently that individuals internalise its normalising effects and then regulate themselves. Baez uses the notion of disciplinary power to explain how expectations are placed upon marginalised identity groups to meet normative standards of whiteness, which leads to self-disciplining within non-white

communities. He argues, "differences among individuals are 'produced', and that 'knowledge' of racial difference initiates (or "coerces") the processes of normalisation and self-regulation (Ibid, 340). This knowledge justifies discriminatory practices, forces individuals to succumb to those practices and makes it seem natural that they should do so" (Ibid., 340). Intersectional black feminist scholar Patricia Hill-Collins (2009, 44) examines racism as "a system of power"[23]. She argues that, "because black is a social concept just as white is", any individual can be "socially blackened", or, "pushed down a social scale of some kind"[24] (Ibid., 42). Collins notes that "socially blackening" is often subscribed in relation to age, religion, ethnicity, class, or other markers of subordinate status (Ibid., 42). Hence to avoid being socially blackened, "black and brown people, among others in the U.S. context, quickly learn to perform a complex calculus as to how much whitening clothing and behaviour may be needed from one situation to the next" (Ibid., 43). What both Collins and Baez[25] describe relates to enforcement of "respectability politics"; the self-disciplining of marginalised communities in order to be accounted for and respected in a world where differing from the normative standard is limiting, and even dangerous to the individual.

It can be argued that various axes of oppression dictate the pathways along which disciplinary power circulates. Where multiple systems of oppression intersect in a person's experience of oppression, the effects of disciplinary regulations and normalisations are experienced more intensely, and in more complex ways. Femmes belonging to marginalised groups may experience more intense levels of disciplinary power; for example, in the policing of black women's bodies (see Carby, 1992). Whilst all women are vulnerable to being sexualised against their will, black women are more frequently subject to hyper-sexualisation based on stereotypes of black women as sexually promiscuous. Higher levels of sexual violence perpetrated against women of colour both historically and in the present day confirm this. Connecting disciplinary power to analyses of both

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[23] See also Homi K. Bhabha (1983) who discusses disciplinary power and stereotyping in colonial discourse, arguing that the stereotype is "an arrested fetishistic mode of representation" and for "the construction of colonial discourse as a complex articulation of the tropes of fetishism - metaphor and metonymy" (Ibid., 375).

[24] See also Richard Dyer's (1988) discussion of the representation of whiteness in the media; which "secures its dominance by seeming to not be anything in particular" to the effect that it becomes "the natural, inevitable, ordinary way of being human" (Ibid., 457).

[25] See also Nadine Ehlers (2012) who draws upon Foucault's concept of disciplinary power and Butler's theories of subjectivity, Ehlers explores the idea that race operates as a disciplinary regime and that the mechanism through which this disciplinary formation is sustained is racial performativity. Ehlers also notes that Foucault only specifically considered race as a topic of sustained analysis in the lecture course published as *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976* (Ibid., 2012). However in this selection of lectures he was concerned with the question of how racism has been used to control the population *en masse*, rather than the micro-level effects on raced individuals (Ibid., 4). Ehlers' work builds on a historical analysis of social constructions of the "pure" white race and the inferiority of blackness in the U.S., and concludes that "race is constructed through arbitrary divisions, ones that must be continually recited in order to be maintained" (Ibid., 31).

race and gender discrimination allows for a more nuanced understanding of intersectional oppression as the product of multiple, intersecting forms of domination.

4.3 Resistance to Disciplinary Power

As Foucault's theory states, where there is power, there is resistance. The central thesis that power is everywhere and expressed in a multitude of individual discourses offers freedom from the inevitability of determinate power. Memes can be viewed as counter-hegemonic modes of discourse and available sites for resistance to disciplinary power. Social media has allowed elite power to become increasingly electronicised, decentralised, and globalised. In light of the fact that network technologies have reinforced existing power structures primarily to the benefit of those whose social identities already grant them privilege[26], resistance must also be digital, decentralised and able to transgress spatial and temporal boundaries. Unlike other forms of online communication, memes can be potentially transgressive in form, content and stance. As Milner (2013b) argues, "the structure is decidedly more open - more the realm of "the people" - than narrow one-to-many modes of communication. Image memes, in their very form, house potential for populist expression and conversation (Ibid.).

4.3.2 Culture Jamming

Cultural or political jamming is the strategy or symbolic action repertoire of various social and political movements that captures and subverts the ideas of mainstream media culture (Wettergren, 2013; Lievrouw, 2011). The original culture jamming movement of the late 20th century was oriented around anti-consumerist and anti-capitalist critiques of media advertising and consumer culture (see Lasn, 2000). Subsequently, this use of playful visual rhetoric was employed for social and political purposes to deconstruct and criticise dominant ideas and representations in the media. Cultural jamming is closely related to the notion of "bricolage"; defined by Hartley (2002) as "the creation of objects with materials to hand, reusing existing artefacts and incorporating bits and pieces" (Cammaerts, 2007, 8).

[26] For in-depth discussion of the political economy of social media and reproduction of social and economic inequalities see Fuchs, 2014; 2014b; 2015; 2017c; Fuchs and Sandoval, 2015).

The main aims of these performances are to "jam" the media; partially using/accepting and partially abusing/rejecting tools of communication from the state and the market (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008, 141). Hence, culture jamming is distinctive in its mining of mainstream culture to reveal and critique the fundamental inequalities, hypocrisies, and absurdities within it (Lievrouw, 2011, 80)[27]. In doing so, culture jamming is both shaped by contemporary media and contests it (Wettergren, 2013). As Lievrouw (2011, 73) states, as a genre of new media activism, jamming "takes the *form* of popular culture, but with the *purpose* of subverting and critiquing that culture". Humour and fun are integral components of the culture jam, deploying irony, parody and absurdity "as a means of exposing social, political and economic problems, attracting adherents, and moving them to action" (Ibid., 84, see also Wettergren, 2013, 7; Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008, 138). The aim of culture jamming is the construction of a counter-hegemony as a strategy to challenge dominant discourses and forces in society by modification of "popular thought and mummified popular culture" (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008, 138).

4.3.3 The Subversiveness of Memes

Memes are closely related to the diffusion of subversive ideas in cultural or political jamming. Culture jammers, according to Lasn (2000), are "meme warriors" and carriers of "a global mindshift" (Wettergren, 2009, 3). As Cammaerts (2007, 17) notes, culture jams, like memes, embody "the de-elitisation of art" and allow for "the citizen/activist to voice dissent and challenge dominant discourses in society". Furthermore, widespread participation to spread memes is key to their influence in the way that "the Internet plays a pivotal role in spreading the jam very much like a virus" (Ibid., 17). Many examples of online culture jamming refer to political issues and usually combine popular culture and politics (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008, 145) in the style of Internet memes. Lievrouw (2011, 30) notes how the "house style" of today's digital culture has

[27] As Cammaerts (2007, 18) notes, "jamming" works through complex and dynamic process that involves an interplay between the micro-political - where the jam is often situated - and the macro-political. The mechanisms of jamming and meme distribution have both been analysed with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1976) concept of the rhizome; a structure that disrupts hierarchical systems by deterritorialising their strata to create new usages for the systems it infiltrates. See Deleuze and Guattari (1987); Cammaerts (2007); Wolfe (2009).

absorbed many of the techniques, styles, and strategies of the Dada[28] and Situationist[29] movements; "especially of alternative and activist projects whose aim is to overturn dominant, taken-for-granted meanings of everyday life and politics"[30]. This involves the "ready appropriation and adaptation of popular media technologies and content to confront and intervene mainstream culture and politics" (Ibid., 30).

Image macros have proven to be an effective medium for distributing culture jams via social media networks[31]. As "grass roots" media that possess the ability to reach wide audiences, memes lend themselves to constructing oppositional forms of knowledge and critique of hegemonic forces. The pre-requisite knowledge of popular digital culture and Internet vernacular to understand memes simultaneously creates resonance with media-savvy Internet users and barriers to elite and authoritative participation. As with culture jamming, shared cultural knowledge can also tighten bonds within these counter-public communities. Furthermore, the meme - like "the political jam" - "is not inherently progressive" (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008, 140), having been used to demonise and essentialise minorities (Cammaerts, 2007, 19) (see chapter two).

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[28] The Dada art movement of the early 20th century was known for being technologically innovative: artists adopted and merged technologies with mass-produced materials and high-art forms (Lievrouw, 2011, 31). Dadaists conceived of themselves as activist artists, combining radical politics with provocative uses of media, performance and language (Ibid., 28). A central Dada tactic was to use art "to disrupt the commonplace and compel new ways of seeing reality" (Lippard, 1971, in Ibid., 32).

[29] French philosopher Guy Debord's movement in resistance to the influence of mass media in post-War Western society, which, the group argued had come to dominate culture and substitute for authentic personal experience, creativity and cultural participation (Lievrouw, 2011, 33). Debord argued that this had created a "Society of the Spectacle"; a disconnect between "spectacular images" being produced and consumed by the population, and the reality of life. To counter these effects, Debord argued, is in what he calls a strategy of "détournement" (literally "turning around, or "turning upside down"); construction of alternative, disruptive representations in everyday life to overturn the dominant, media-driven representations of culture and politics. In particular, this strategy emphasised subverting or inverting the original meanings of borrowed images, texts or other elements (Ibid., 36) (For further reading see Debord, 1967; 1997).

[30] For a fuller history of the numerous artistic and cultural movements that have inspired the development of "culture jamming" see Cammaerts (2007).

[31] See Davis et al (2016) for an example of how memes were used as digital participatory culture jamming techné to subvert the oil corporation Shell's advertisements and protest the company's Arctic oil-drilling practices in a campaign initiated by Greenpeace.

4.4 Summary and Reflections

In sum, the feminist politics of the Third Wave can be defined as a form of "embodied politics" (Fixmer and Wood, 2005); the embodiment of the feminist principles of multiplicity, inclusivity and the politics of the everyday in feminist rhetoric, activism and in the individual lives of Third Wavers. Fixmer and Wood connect this focus on micro-political forms of resistance and power with Foucault's notion of power as "disciplinary". Disciplinary power has been extrapolated to structural marginalisation and oppression by race and gender scholars who conceive of these systems of domination as disciplinary. I connect this to intersectionality theory by arguing that intersecting oppressions produce new forms of oppression because these represent the intersection of different forms of disciplinary power. Therefore resistance to these particular forms must be grounded in an approach which recognises these intersections and resists them where they appear.. Feminists co-opt a channel of communication with lineage in white and male-dominated subcultures that is strongly associated with spawning racist, classist and sexist jokes, to subvert these tools with alternative ideologies. Hence, feminist, and other social justice-oriented memes, can be conceptualised as a form of "culture jamming"; a political art movement that subverts capitalist materials to produce new oppositional messages. Fotopoulou (2016a, 13) attends to the paradox contained in online feminist discourse, arguing that feminism and queer critique challenge new forms of disciplinary power while their political project is performed with digital capitalism. As Mina (2013) argues, "in a social media landscape where user behaviours are subtly guided by algorithms and systemic infrastructure of the platforms we use day to day; the policing of the digital subject, memes are rather like "the street art of the web"".

I have chosen to employ two key theories pertaining to "disciplinary power" and "embodied politics" to discuss power and resistance because both are appropriate to studying both intersectional discourse and online modes of communication. As Fixmer and Wood explain, the idea of "embodiedness" is intimately related to Foucault's conception of power as "disciplinary" because both approaches view power and resistance as enacted in "local sites". Intersectional feminism aims to generate consciousness of the multiple, complex and intertwining ways that oppression works to marginalise certain people based on various societal norms. Intersectionality therefore stresses the ways in which an interplay of macro-social and political systems can sometimes appear in micro-forms, and how these should be recognised and resisted as and when they appear.

These theories can help to address the research questions, tracing; 1) the ways in which intersectional feminist discourse is configured, and 2) the reasons for this configuration, because forms of digital communication can be viewed as mechanisms of power that are also constructed in response to, and with an effect upon, real world events. With a focus on memes as a form of mediated discourse on the political and the personal, the embodiment of feminist principles in perceiving and carrying out micro-political actions is of key relevance. Foucault's revolutionary idea of "disciplinary power" has been elaborated on extensively, and previous applications in gender and race studies suggest that this concept is appropriate to address intersectional feminism. I also believe that Fixmer and Wood's notion of "embodied politics" closely represents Third Wave feminist values based on the authors' close readings of the aforementioned anthologies, and because their ideas are well-supported by literature on the Third Wave. Despite this, their approach has hardly been developed further or applied elsewhere, and so I aim to draw attention how this theory remains highly applicable to feminism today, including the digital.

5. Methodology

This chapter will outline my overall methodological approach, the choice of methods inside this approach, and will explain and evaluate how these methods are used in the study; in terms of appropriateness for the purpose of the research, validity, ethics, and scope of the data gathered.

5.1 Digital Ethnography

Ethnography is an epistemological approach that guides the research process through fieldwork, analysis and interpretation of material, and presentation of the results by the ethnographer. Ethnography seeks to understand human culture, community and experience by engaging with participants using qualitative research methods. Ethnographers take varying different styles to their approach but all can be said to aim for a degree of: transparency (showing the research process as a logical outcome); relativity (building on reflections from other texts and findings); and self-reflexivity (distancing oneself from the field through a deepened knowledge of methods, critique and analysis). Ethnography is an interdisciplinary approach that is useful when engaged through a particular disciplinary paradigm, and in combination with other practices and ideas (Clifford and Marcus, 1986, 3; Pink et al, 2016, 2)**.** Hence, this authority has spread to many fields where "culture" is a newly problematic object of description and critique (Clifford and Marcus, 1986, 3). Ethnographic research methods have often been employed by communication scholars to analyse communication behaviours and phenomena in relation to media.

"Digital Ethnography" applies the principles of classic ethnography to the online social world by taking as its starting point the idea that digital media and technologies are part of the everyday and more spectacular worlds that people inhabit (Pink et al, 2016, 7). Pink et al's key principles for doing digital ethnography are: multiplicity, non-digital-centric, openness, reflexivity, and being unorthodox (Ibid., 8). Applying an approach that places importance on multiplicity allows research on digital media to consider carefully how the technologies under study intersect with the everyday lives of participants, and with the research process itself. Decentering the digital in digital media research allows the analysis to take full account of how these media are part of wider sets of environments and relations (Ibid., 9). "In keeping the place of digital media relational to other domains of the research topic, site and methods, we are able to understand the digital as part of

something wider, rather than situating it at the centre of our work" (Ibid., 11). This enriches both the ways in which we study digital media, their uses, qualities, and affordances, and the ways in which these studies create insights into the digital impacts on other strands and elements that constitute everyday environments, experiences, activities and relationships" (Ibid., 11). The openness of digital ethnography offers a way to conceptualise research processes in terms of an open and flexible research design The authors note that transferring the concept of openness to 'digital culture' helps us to be open to other influences (like speculative design or arts practice) as well as to the needs of other disciplines that can be combined with digital ethnography (Ibid., 11). Digital ethnography also embodies the reflexivity of classic ethnography which engages with the subjectivity of the research encounter and applies this to how our relationships with the digital in our research practice determine how we produce knowledge (Ibid., 12-13). Finally, digital ethnography must be unorthodox as it requires attention to alternative ways of communicating that might be otherwise invisible and that might be unanticipated by more formally constituted research approaches (Ibid.,13).

5.1.1 Use of Digital Ethnography

Following a digital ethnographic approach, I employ a methodological toolkit that begins with the use of online observations, and incorporates an in-depth content analysis of memes using visual social semiotic analysis, and in-depth interviewing of Instagram users. The results are synthesised in the analysis to allow the methods to complement each other and to draw out similar themes. Online observations function as an over-arching tool that informs study of intersectional feminist memes and helps to answer the aim and both research questions. Visual social semiotic analysis is primarily designed to address the descriptive research element and connects to **RQ1: how are memes used as a feminist mode of discourse?** Interviewing is primarily designed to address the explanatory research element and connects to **RQ2: what are the aims and motives of the producers of feminist memes?** However, both methods are open to producing findings relating to both questions, so data from both methods can be used in complementary fashion. Use of these methods within a digital ethnographic approach employs a constructivist approach to understanding online sociality that views digital technology as relational to how real experiences, environments, activities and relationships are constituted in the digital realm. This fits within an over-arching cultural analytical approach in order to explore memes as objects created with intentions that are embedded within a social and cultural context.

5.1.2 Applying an Ethnographic Approach to Memes

Previous studies of memes have tended to be methodologically broad; for example, using quantitative analysis (Bauckhage, 2011; Shifman and Boxman-Shabtai, 2014; Shifman and Boxman-Shabtai, 2015; Duscherer and Dovidio, 2016) or a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis methods (Shifman and Thelwall, 2009; Shifman and Blondheim, 2010) to produce breadth, rather than depth, of data. Furthermore, research has analysed memes in terms of popularity and spread - theoretically informed by perspectives on reproduction and distribution of communicative texts (see for example Wiggins and Bowers' (2015) use of "structurational theory"). As Mina (2013) argues, a data-based approach to studying memes captures the *how*, whilst a cultural analytical approach using the tools of visual analysis, visual rhetoric and ethnographic interviewing also captures the *why*. A comprehensive tapestry of the ways in which memes interact with social, cultural and political realities will require a combination of quantitative "big data" analysis and qualitative close reading of texts (Shifman, 2014, 174). As Shifman (2014) argues, more in-depth qualitative research on memes is required for a deeper understanding of them, and should benefit from use of a communications perspective. However, I argue that a combination of a communications perspective and an ethnographic approach would be most useful for a qualitative study.

Qualitative studies of memes have applied both a semiotic approach and a discursive approach (Huntingdon, 2013, 2). Semiotic studies similarly can decode texts but are not able to investigate them as socially embedded practices. Discursive studies have used methods such as discourse analysis, framing memes as a literary practice (see Knobel and Lankshear, 2008). Huntingdon (2013) advocates a visual rhetoric approach to studying memes which draws on both semiotic and discursive approaches to analyse their persuasive elements. Examining memes as a form of rhetoric can certainly aid an understanding of how they function in participatory culture (Ibid., 3) but does not explore this rhetoric as a social practice formed by social context.

Another limitation of studies on memes is that they have often focused exclusively on viral memes, to follow the spread and remix of online content. This omits an examination of memes as social practices by not gaining any perspective from the people behind their production and distribution. Since memes are building blocks of digital culture, understanding them means understanding

ourselves. Hence, this necessitates a human-centered approach to studying online sociality which can benefit from the use of digital ethnography.

5.2 Online Observation

Observation is a highly useful empirical method for ethnographic, and also digital ethnographic, studies. Observations within ethnography aim to pinpoint cultural phenomena within people and communities by the researcher attempting to view these phenomena from the perspective of the participants. This is intended to create knowledge about communities and cultures by embedding oneself within the field to get "close" to the phenomena being studied. Observations constitute an important research tool within the inductive approach of this study, as the aim and research questions were formulated following my initial observations of feminist memes.

5.2.1 Observing Instagram

My online observations of intersectional feminist memes on Instagram began in December 2016 and continued throughout the duration of this study (until May 2017). These observations initially allowed me to get to know "the field" and make decisions in selecting meme account administrators to invite for interviewing, and in selecting images for conducting semiotic analysis. The "field" consisted of roughly 50 Instagram accounts which post memes related to feminism, cultural, political and social issues and are run by femmes.Within this field I chose Instagram users who regularly posted memes to their account, even if not all of their posts were memes. These were considered relevant in being administered by people who have made meme production a regular practice and part of their online presentation on Instagram. Over time, these continued observations also informed my knowledge of how this community developed, and how changes in political and social context, and the personal contexts of the account holders, changed over the duration of these six months. Although as a "non-participatory" observer, my observations were limited to what was publicly visible on Instagram, I believe the use of ethnographic interviews compensated in providing information on how community relations worked.

5.3 Visual Social Semiotics

Semiotics is the study of "signs" as processes of meaning making. From semiotics, social semiotics was developed which additionally placed "the study of signifying practices in specific sociocultural contexts" (Oxford University Press, 2011). Social semiotics is therefore the study of social meaning making practices, **"**concerned with "meaning in all its appearances, in all social occasions and in all cultural sites" (Kress, 2010, 2). Social semiotics emphasises the social and cultural context in which signs create meaning, and in doing so, explores how sign systems are shaped by power relations and social norms. Hodge and Kress (1988) focused on semiotic systems in social practice and argued that the interpretation involves situating signs within discourses; which form the exchanges of interpretive communities. This process of interpretation can contest the power of hegemonic discourses - for example, feminist activists defacing a sexist advertising billboard by spray-painting it with a feminist message.

The field of visual social semiotics originated in the 1990s and applies the work of social semiotics to visual material. This type of analysis emphasises the image as a social process in itself, and its meaning as "a negotiation between the producer and the viewer, reflecting their individual social/ cultural/political beliefs, values, and attitudes" (Harrison, 2003, 47). Within scholarship, visual social semiotics has come to be recognised as a useful method for navigating the proliferation of visual online content. John Grady (2001) called for more integration of "visual sociology" as a branch within the field of sociology as a whole. Visual media and messages increasingly dominate mass communications (Ibid., 83), and now dominate the social web (see chapter 2.4). Grady also argues that "the image is a unique form of data"; "tangibly objective" but "irreducibly subjective" (Ibid., 84). Whilst Grady referred to photographs, his argument that the image "can represent complex subjective processes in an extraordinarily objective form" is also applicable to other types of online images.

As Martin Hand (2017, 222) argues, qualitative interpretive researchers are faced with more visual data, but more significantly with the embedding of visual data within multiple uses and diverse practices that are not necessarily "photographic". Furthermore, what makes pictures so valuable in human communication is that they encode an enormous amount of information in a single display or representation (Ibid., 85). The use of an approach to studying visual data which is grounded in sociology can draw out meanings from the finer details of an image; "sociology is often defined as a

field that studies the deeper and wider significance of what, to the uninitiated, might appear to be mundane or banal" (Ibid., 90). A visual sociological approach takes image macro memes as rich repositories of information that constitute sites of socially and culturally informed meaning making.

5.3.1 Use of Visual Social Semiotics to Interpret Memes

Visual social semiotics, compared to other theoretic frameworks for examining how images convey meaning, is unique in stressing that an image is not the result of a single, isolated, creative activity, but is itself a social process (Harrison, 2003, 47). I use visual social semiotics to conduct a content analysis of the visual data collected, as this grounds the method in a sociological approach necessary to exploring memes as social practices. I determine this as an appropriate method to draw together the studies of visual culture and systems of meaning making within particular social and cultural contexts.

The framework of visual social semiotics developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) recognises that an image performs three kinds of meta-semiotic tasks to create meaning; the *representational* metafunction, the *interpersonal* metafunction, and the *compositional* metafunction (Harrison, 2003, 50). The representational metafunction asks "what is the image about?"; the interpersonal asks "how does the image engage the viewer?" and the compositional asks "how do the representational and interpersonal metafunctions relate to each other to create meaning?" (Ibid., 2003). Limor Shifman's (2013, 177) definition of memes as a group of "digital content units sharing common characteristics of content, form and stance" has theoretically informed the use of visual social semiotics to study memes in this case study. Compartmentalising memes into content, form and stance suggests how we can analyse them as visual rhetoric. The content and form of memes can be studied using the representational metafunction, and the stance of memes can be studied using the interpersonal metafunction and the compositional metafunction. Additionally, Shifman's (2014b) note on the "hypersignification" of image memes informs the use of in-depth methodological tool for their interpretation. As she notes, photo-based meme genres tell us something about the mechanisms of signification: they are more about the process of meaning-making than about meaning itself.

5.4 In-depth Interviewing

In-depth interviewing is considered the empirical backbone of qualitative research within the social sciences, and constitutes an important tool for (digital) ethnographic studies. When carried out effectively, ethnography has the epistemological advantage of allowing the researcher to grasp the point of view of the actor (Becker, 1996, 4). In-depth semi-structured interviews are designed to allow participants to tell their own stories using their own definitions, schemata, constructs, and meanings. Rose (2012) argues that engaging with Instagram users represents the only means of assessing the meaning of posts in relation to their site of creation and the site where they encounter an audience. This is also the area where the least amount of work has been done on Instagram. Research on memes should make use of digital ethnography in order to understand the ideas, motives and experiences that inform the creation and co-constitution of memes, with an emphasis on memes as both socially and technologically constructed objects.

5.4.1 Interviewing Meme Creators

As this study aims to understand a specific phenomenon on Instagram rather than general Instagram usage, I follow Laestadius' (2017, 580) approach in taking a small sample to produce data that is qualitatively rich in depth rather than breadth. The data selection process was carried out manually via a considered review of several femme Instagram accounts which use memes to discuss social and political issues. In choosing account administrators to interview I wanted to hear from a range of perspectives, so to reflect the diversity within this community. Therefore, I made a conscious decision to try to include diversity in my sample and include participants with different racial, gendered, religious, and national identities which influenced their perspectives and shaped their online practices. I invited participants to interview via Instagram direct message; a private message function of the Instagram mobile app, whereby I presented myself to prospective interviewees as a master student, giving my full name and details about my degree programme (see p.130 in Appendices)**.** I also explained briefly the purpose of my study and the reasons for my interest in interviewing them. If I received a positive response agreeing to an interview, I followed this up by requesting to stay in contact via email to arrange a day and time, and also to send more detailed information about the interview process, anonymity, consent and privacy.

All nine interviews took place between February and March 2017 via the instant messaging platform, Google Hangouts. Using non-visual or verbal digitised communication meant that body language cues and voice cues could not form part of the analysis as with a face-to-face interview, or online video chat. However, instant messaging adequately fulfilled the aim of finding out interviewees' attitudes. This method also allowed participants time to think through and formulate answers without feeling the pressure of being watched by an interviewer, which produced in-depth responses. I chose to conduct "active" semi-structured interviews to allow flexibility to add questions as the interview unfolded, and to alter the order of my prepared questions. The conversation was divided into key themes; the motives for making memes, the practice of making memes, thoughts on intersectional feminism, thoughts on memes as a transgressive medium, and thoughts on the potential benefits of memes and social media (see p.131 in Appendices for Interview Guide).

5.5 Ethics

I base an ethical evaluation of my study on the general ethnographic research issues that I felt were applicable to this study in order to ensure this study does not breach any ethical concerns; informed consent, privacy, anonymity and risk of harm. In order to obtain informed consent, participants were briefed on the general nature and aims of the study, and the fact the final copy of the thesis would be posted online and viewable by the public. I also welcomed and responded to any questions participants had to ensure that they were well-informed about the arrangements, and hoping to eliminate any feelings of uncertainty. The initial disclosure sent to participants before the interview (see p.130 in Appendices) let them know that they could refuse to answer a question or end the discussion at any time if they so wished, so that they did not feel under pressure to do anything that they were not fully comfortable with.

With regards to privacy, only Instagram accounts that were set to public for the duration of this study were involved. As Laestedius (2017, 583) points out, changing an account to private may imply a withdrawal of consent for this data to be made public. However, the continual monitoring for deletion of posts and privatising of accounts is beyond the capacity of most researchers. Furthermore, the public availability of information should not be taken to mean that the user lacks expectations for privacy (Ibid., 583). I navigate this concern by referring to content that was

produced by interviewees with public accounts, who consented to the use of their content and interview data. The pre-interview disclosure informed participants that the information would be publicly available via the *DiVA Portal archive*[32], so participants could consent to this beforehand.

This disclosure also reminded participants that they had the option of anonymity and at the end of each interview I requested confirmation of the level of anonymity that they preferred: full anonymity, Instagram username, or their username and their real name. I also offered the option of omitting or including personal details such as age, location and occupation. Clarifying these options at the end of the interview was intended to allow participants to review their level of anonymity based on what they had disclosed in the interview. After all nine interviews were completed, the decision was taken to reference all interviewees by their Instagram username, which ensures a greater degree of anonymity in case they were to change their mind after this work is published.

With regards to risk of harm, I also evaluated the interview process and maintain that no harm could come to participants from this. I ensured that no questions were included that risked causing harm to participants. I also feel that I was attentive and respectful as an interviewer and helped to let participants feel comfortable during the interview, which positive feedback suggests. Furthermore, all participants verified that they are over 18 years old so that only ethical concerns relevant to adults and not to minors are applicable here.

With regards to presentation of the interviewees, my concern arose over the issue of making a point to show the marginalised categories of identity that they occupy (other than female/femme). Interviewees sometimes spoke to me about experiences of oppression without explicating what these oppressions referred to. This is likely because they have often been open about their identity on Instagram and did not need to spell out to me why they experience these oppressions. However, I have concluded that without explicating this in the analysis, I have left out evidence of the subject position of the interviewee that relates directly to their use of memes, and their aims and motives. Therefore, when making these identities explicit to the reader, I aim to do so in a way that avoids speaking on behalf of others; by only making evident the aspects of interviewees' identity that they openly speak about on their Instagram account or during the interview. I also aim to avoid appearing tokenistic; by integrating this information into an analysis of how such aspects of femme

[32] Accessible via http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/search.jsf?dswid=-9268.

identity inform their online practices. In turn, this is an example of where use of online observations has enabled me to better understand the social and cultural context of meme creators, and complements use of other methods in the overall analysis.

5.6 Limitations of the Study

Due to the limited scope that this thesis is able to cover, I was only able to account for the images posted on Instagram without integrating a study of captions and comments into the analysis. As Highfield and Leaver (2014) state, Instagram affords the researcher an ample amount of rich qualitative data by combining visual imagery with captions, hashtags and comments (Laestedius, 2017, 578). However, the quantity of data collected from observations, semiotic analyses and interviewing was deemed a sufficient amount capable of addressing the research questions. I also believe that this study could benefit from use of a wider scope across cultural and social contexts. Participants within the community I study in terms of socio-economic background, ethnicity, gender identity, and location to some extent (seven interviewees are North American, one Australian, and one British). However, I acknowledge that despite this level of diversity, the study is based largely within a Western, primarily U.S., context. However, this does not limit the ability to meet the research needs here as the empirical material is analysed with an understanding of Third Wave feminism that has largely originated from the movement in North America. Still, the communications field would benefit greatly from an enlarged focus on non-Western contexts and I encourage future research to explore the ways in which new media is being used for feminism in diverse locations.

5.7 Standpoint as a Researcher

It must also be noted that any exploration of the material and subsequent interpretations will inevitably be filtered through a personal lens which is influenced by my own experiences, privileges, biases and other individual factors. As a middle class, white, cis-gendered and able-bodied woman, I am aware that my understandings of the experiences of people of colour and other minority voices will be limited at best. So it is with this awareness that I aim to allow these perspectives to speak for themselves even as I produce interpretations from them. To invoke Harding on standpoint theory, starting research from marginalised perspectives as a researcher who

does not share in all of these marginalised identities does not necessarily constrain the ability to generate accounts that maximise "strong objectivity" (Harding, 1992, 584). Furthermore, this should form one of the goals of the educational process (Ibid., 584).

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach that has been undertaken in the empirical study which informs this research. A digital ethnographic approach is useful for producing rich qualitative data, and therefore can be used for exploring the social and cultural context of production, reproduction and reception of memes. Digital ethnography applies the ideals of classic ethnographic research to the online social world, and in doing so, it decodes and recodes to produce knowledge; posing "questions at the boundaries of civilizations, cultures, classes, races, and genders… [of] diversity, inclusion and exclusion" (Clifford and Marcus, 1986, 2). The methods I employ within this approach are online observation, visual social semiotic analysis and in-depth interviewing. I have also considered ethical concerns and possible limitations of the study in order to ensure that this study does not violate ethical guidelines and provides a scientifically valid and useful contribution to the field.

6. Analysis

The following section presents a synthesised analysis of the empirical data collected from online observations of the feminist meme community, participant interviews, and visual social semiotic analysis of selected online content. The theoretical framework I present in chapter four is applied to the findings derived from these methods, which are outlined in the following text. The analysis is presented according to thematic categories that I have constructed from an inductive analysis and interpretation of the material using a combination of the aforementioned research methods.

A brief summary of interviewee data is presented below:

Interviewee	Interview Date	Age	Location	Occupation
@goldnosering	03.02.2017	23	U.S.A.	Student
@ada.wrong	05.02.2017	21	N.Y, U.S.A.	Programmer
@yung_nihilist	19.02.2017	23	N.Y, U.S.A.	Production Assistant
@bunnymemes	20.02.2017	22	Miami, U.S.A.	Student
@fluentfascist	21.02.2017	28	Baltimore, U.S.A.	-
@esoteric_queen	11.03.2017	20	Australia	Student
@tequilafunrise	14.03.2017	23	U.S.A.	Student
@distressed_memes	20.03.2017	-	U.K.	-
@problematiqueer	30.03.2017	20	L.A, U.S.A.	Student

The diversity of the feminist meme community - and the participants of this study - is important to highlight because this is central to its intersectional ethos. The majority of interviewees, whilst of Western (mostly U.S.) nationality, have immigrant or non-white ancestry (Chinese, Korean, Hispanic, South Asian, African American) and speak about how this has affected their views and online practices as a person of colour. Participants also cited religious identity, socio-economic background, gender identity and sexuality as factors which shape their experiences of the world. The interviews also include discussions of experiences related to relationships, family circumstances, and mental health; including addiction, trauma, and the effects of assault. Hence, whilst many sentiments are shared by the community, individual stories are deeply personal and based upon individual identities and experiences, which the community is inclusive of and accepting of.

The data is presented under three over-arching themes: “creating empathy and solidarity” (6.1), “deconstructing and decentering dominant norms” (6.2), and “amplifying personal narratives” (6.3). Within each of these sections, I present specific sub-themes which are derived from interpretation of data produced during the processes of observing, interview coding, and semiotic analysis. Within these sub-themes, I have pinpointed the different *modes* by which these actions are achieved. Although, it is sometimes difficult to separate the descriptive (RQ1) from the explanatory findings (RQ2) due to the overlap between *how* memes are used in feminist discourse and *the motivations* for this practice, I have attempted to make clear these distinctions where they appear.

6.1. Creating Empathy and Solidarity

Memes have taken on the speculative connotation of “relatability”; “an ability to provoke a feeling of identification in the viewer” (Dean, 2016). This relatability helps memes sustain a kind of cohesion in “collective being” (Ibid.). Feminist memes make use of meme relatability to construct the sense of unity based on this commonality, but moreover, to foster empathy and solidarity for others. This is enacted via strategic use of three modes: language, humour, and intertextuality.

6.1.1. Modes of Relatability

General online observations and in-depth semiotic analysis provided evidence as to how intersectional feminist memes function as a mode of feminist discourse, via various modes to construct relatability (RQ1).

Language Framing

Generally, memes typically aim to engage with an audience via relying on an audience’s familiarity with the concepts they present, thus giving them a relatable factor. Milner argues that, in this way, memes are a “media lingua franca” that “balance the familiar and the foreign, the collective and the individual” to create novel forms of expression translatable to a receptive audience (Milner, 2013a). Milner applies Burgess (2007, 32) thesis on “vernacular creativity” to memes; this form of expression which is “not elite or institutionalised; nor is it extraordinary or spectacular, but rather is identified on the basis of its commonness” (Milner, 2013a, 2). Observing feminist memes on

Instagram, I identified that many replicate the relatability by constructing a basis of commonality between the producer and the viewer. Through a close reading of several memetic texts using visual social semiotic analysis, I found that part of this feature is through the use of language framing. The interpersonal metafunction of images refers to how the author relates to the viewer via the use of media (including text and image). Text captioning images in the memes studied here constructed an invitation for identification or empathy from the viewer. Use of "TFW" ("that face/feeling when") and the use of "you" and "your" relate to an audience by inviting them to put themselves in the position of the author. This moves beyond simply construing a discourse but frames this discourse in such a way that the viewer is made aware that they are reading something that has likely been experienced by the author and are being asked to view this situation from their perspective.

Humour and Bonding

Memes are almost entirely jokes, even if they are sometimes jokes that cover political issues (Milner, 2012, 48). Their humorous nature thus can deliver a political message to an audience that is receptive to it via an entertaining medium. Knobel and Lankshear (2007) and Shifman (2012, 2013b) find that humour is a cornerstone for memetic success. The use of humour in image memes serves their function as relatable content by relying on jokes which revolve around an audience's familiarity with pop culture, politics and real world events. Furthermore, as Kuipers (2009, 219) argues, sharing humour signals similarity - and similarity breeds closeness. Humour conveys "sociability"; an invitation which is aimed at "decreasing social distance" (Ibid., 220). The use of humour can therefore be a useful device to gain empathy from an audience. As Kuipers also notes, "knowledge is required to understand humour" which is "one of the mechanisms by which humour marks symbolic boundaries" (Ibid., 225).

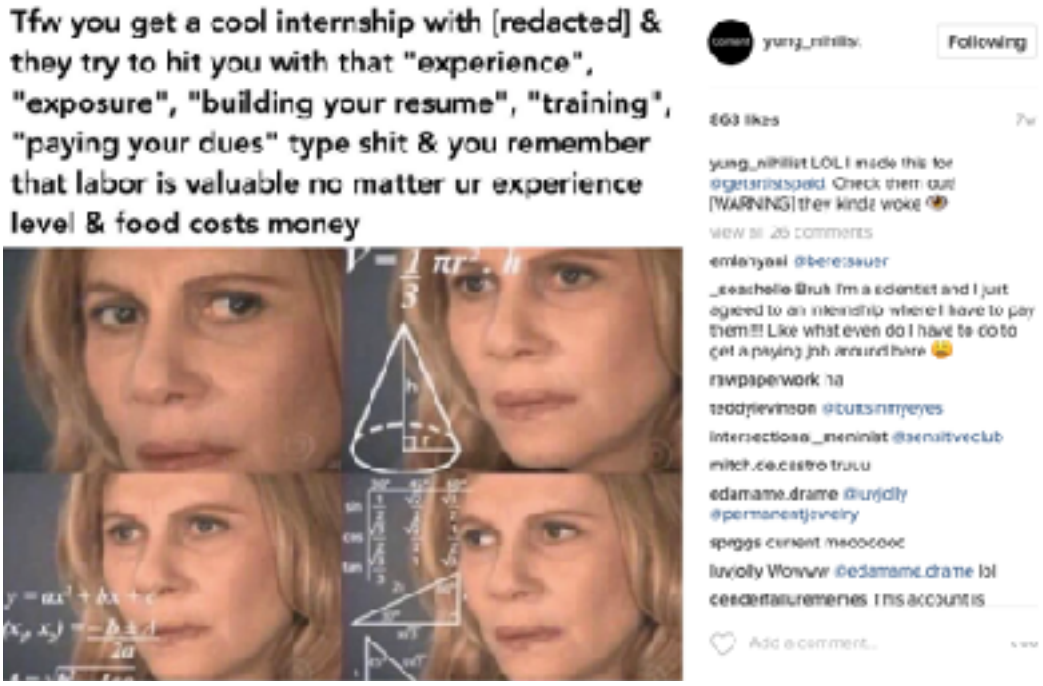
Intertextuality and Popular Culture

Internet memes are deeply intertwined with other - former and contemporary - forms of cultural representation (Nissenbaum and Shifman, 2015, 484). The user who creates user-generated content in the form of memes does not post them randomly but addresses a specific familiar crowd (Burgess, 2008). Memes thus function as part of a culture, contributing to the set of ideas around which communities gather and act (Nissenbaum and Shifman, 2015, 485). Memes share with

postmodern literary humour a style that is characterised by irony, self-referential humour, intertextuality, and play on genre and form.

Kuipers (2009, 229) notes that in postmodern literature, such meta-humour distinguishes itself by use of humour and play on form, and also by referencing of popular culture and youth styles. As products of contemporary participatory culture, memes are often created by repurposing items from digital culture, as well as popular culture at large (Knobel and Lankshear, 2007; Nissenbaum and Shifman, 2015, 485). References borrowed from movies, adverts, games and street art reciprocally influence, and are influenced by, Internet memes (Ibid., 485). Use of popular viral memes within the feminist meme context signifies a shared knowledge of digital culture typical of meme-based communities which signifies an in-group dynamic. As Miltner (2014) finds, intertextual references are key to the creation of in-jokes within meme communities; "memes are jokes your friends don't get". Remixing popular meme formats also makes use of the referential meanings they contain but can exploit their availability for recontextualisation to produce new meaning. Laineste and Voolaid (2017) highlight intertextuality as a central feature within the sharing of cultural texts in how new memes are formed from previous ones. The authors argue that the "resemioticisation"of cultural items and "entextualisation"; the "adjusting of cultural texts so that they become meaningful and relevant to the to the target culture" are processes of meaning-making which occur in the production of memes (Ibid., 28).

The viral meme "Confused Math Lady" [see Figure 8] is employed by @yung_nihilist to create humour and to intertextual meaning that relies on the audience's familiarity with the concept. The image of the woman with superimposed mathematical equations is often used as a reaction image to express confusion (*KnowYourMeme*, 2017). Intertextual humour makes use of an audiences' familiarity with the meme and the incongruity between the original image and its recontextualisation alongside the critical piece of text. Kuipers (2009, 221) notes that a central ingredient to all humour is incongruity: humour is always based on some sort of juxtaposition of mismatched elements. The creative blend of pop culture and politics that can be achieved by memes produces humour by its use of these incongruous elements. Furthermore, as Shifman (2014, 136) notes, because "pop culture is part of people's everyday lives and cultural identities, using it to talk about politics makes the latter more approachable. Pop culture thus serves as a platform through which individuals can communicate with each other about politics in a playful and engaging way".



[Figure 8]

Internet memes generally make frequent use of celebrity images to garner a broad appeal, given the audience's pre-existing knowledge of the persona. The use of celebrity in memes fits logically into today's digital culture in which photographed bodies become stock material for creative remix, and mediated celebrity culture in which vast volumes of images of celebrities circulate online as ephemeral objects. From my online observations I note that female celebrities are often pictured in feminist memes, thus shaping them into shared cultural texts based on shared familiarity with young and popular celebrities such as Rihanna.

In @esoteric-queen's meme [see Figure 9] Rihanna and talk show host Oprah Winfrey - both internationally renowned successful women - are pictured in what appears to be rather like mother-daughter relationship. The caption celebrates female role models and support between older and younger generations of women. The use of these pop culture icons as representative participants - and the relationship to each other that the image suggests - aids construction of the meaning; through the use of well-known strong female figures that resonate with the audience.

[Figure 9]

6.1.2 Relating and Empathy

Interviewing of meme creators illuminated motivations for using memes to promote feminist ideas online, relating here to the types of connections formed with others (RQ2). Through the prism of "relatability" feminist memes construct a basis for commonality and empathy. Memes often require readers to operationalise on gendered, classed, and raced classificatory knowledge and construct social forms of commonality on this basis (Kanai, 2016). The forming of a common bond based on the shared recognition and understanding of real, lived experiences fosters a kind of solidarity between the producer and the viewer. These forms of "weak ties" are crucial bonds in social networks that allow for information sharing and strengthen the group as a whole (see Granovetter, 1983). In response to the question "*What kind of reactions do you receive in response to your memes?*" all nine interviewees commented they receive messages from people to say that they have related to their meme(s), usually with a sense of gratitude. Talking about the specifics of race, gender and class allows for connections to be made that increases a sense of solidarity between femmes, as @problematiqueer expressed:

> "overwhelmingly, i get affirming responses from folks about either feeling affirmed or wanting to affirm others going through it [and] i think more about the desire i've always had to affirm and validate others who are struggling, and how lucky i am that the reach of my ability to do that keeps growing" (@problematiqueer).

In conditioning subjects to unquestioningly accept the nature of power relations disciplinary power conditions subjects of marginalised groups to accept their subordinate status, and even to blame themselves for unequal status in the eyes of mainstream society. Intersectional feminist memes can reverse this process by voicing concerns in a mutual process of seeking and giving validation. Relatable feminist memes can thus produce solidarity; unity of agreement on a feeling, belief or attitude that resists disciplinary norms. Interviewees commented that they identified with the content that they saw produced by other femme meme creators which inspired them to create their own, for example:

"I think it's really interesting to see spaces where female voices are so loud and relatable. I was amazed at some of gothshakira's memes that would discuss issues like toxic masculinity and being a 20 year old female in this world and how relatable they were. So many topics were being discussed. Female meme accounts share experiences that are uniquely female, and I wanted to be a part of that dialogue and share some of my own experiences" (@esoteric_queen).

Creating Empathy

Interviewees discussed how sharing these specific experiences and receiving feedback from people who could identify and empathise with their situation was beneficial to their coping with these experiences:

"the more I started to discuss things I've rarely talked about publicly - my mental health, relationships etc, the more people related and I took comfort in the shared experiences" (@esoteric_queen).

"what kept me going in making them was seeing people genuinely relating to these ultra specific scenarios I paint…I receive messages weekly thanking me for my memes and for helping people to feel less alone in their experiences and feelings. Any platform that opens the opportunity to discuss real life openly and without judgement will without a doubt change our perceptions" (@bunnymemes).

Raising these issues as significant can help to alleviate feelings of loneliness and the emotional effects of enduring these experiences without the knowledge that they are being shared by others - making an individual experience into a shared collective one:

"a common theme i see within non-male meme creators is the trope of being involved with a male romantic partner who "ghosts" you, aka disappears from texts, social media, etc. without contacting you…if so many people have this specific experience, then maybe we should view it as a pattern of behaviour rather than isolated instances" (@goldnosering).

The positive effect of this communication is in making these isolated concerns "real" and valid, and to be viewed as symptomatic of a broader issue resulting from normalisation of gendered behaviour such as male entitlement to use women, and mens' reluctance to be honest about their feelings to their partners. Relating to, and empathising with, others' experiences puts into practice the Third Wave feminist principle explained by Fixmer and Wood (2005) as "building coalitions to forge an inclusive solidarity". Additionally, Yu (2011, 877) argues that, in the Third Wave, personal narrative continues to play an important role in helping young women recognise that their experiences of oppression or discrimination are not isolated. In the text "Bloodlove" from Barbara Findlen's "Listen Up" Third Wave anthology, Christine Doza (1995, 44-45) writes that: "once I felt totally alienated from other girls. I wasn't one of Us or one of Them. I was an alien. And even though I knew I was right about everything, somehow everyone else thought I was wrong. So through writing and distributing, I discovered this whole other world out there and became part of a dialogue that included anyone who had anything to say".

Creating Solidarity

Fixmer and Wood (2005, 240) emphasise that Third Wave feminists seek to build solidarity by "insistence on acknowledging and wrestling with the complexities and contradictions within and between women". In sharing personal experiences, not only can common concerns be made visible, but specific concerns of particular groups of femmes can be acknowledged. Therefore, Third Wavers also aim to recognise that the concerns of their sisters who may encounter different experiences of oppression to their own, are equally as valid, and to stand in solidarity with each other. This gives greater value to the voices and to the particular concerns of marginalised femmes due to an intersectionality of oppressions. Third wavers recognise that an inclusive and diverse community should not attempt to universalise the femme experience to unify feminists but should create solidarity through acknowledgement of the differences that define it. @distressed_memes described how hearing of others' experiences without being able to identify with them encouraged her to be a supportive ally towards them, and fostered solidarity:

"On a personal level, I feel a lot more secure in my emotions - I know that I'm not crazy for feeling a certain way. As well as this, I feel like I have more empathy/compassion for others, because in reading other people's memes you really pay attention to their struggle too. The meme community has its ups and downs like any other, but I've gained a sense of solidarity with other femmes. Even if they can't always relate to my situation or vice versa, we respect each other's

views and you often find yourself thinking 'oh I never thought of it like that', so it's been really eye opening" (@distressed_memes).

@problematiqueer also commented that their memes:

"focus a lot on marginalized issues, mostly mental health but also my experiences being queer and trans. I want to help people feel less alone whilst also destigmatizing those issues for people who don't experience them" (@problematiqueer).

Feminist forging of "an inclusive solidarity" (Fixmer and Wood, 2005, 240) helps Third Wavers "resist tendencies to ignore or devalue people who belong to groups other than their own". As Doza (1995, 253) writes: "every minute of every day I am being colonised, manipulated and ignored, and…minute by minute I am doing this to others. There's a system of abuse here, I need to know what part I'm playing in it" (Ibid., 240). These marginalising tendencies - the result of hierarchical systems of gender, race, and class - can be conceptualised as a form of disciplinary power filtering via everyday sites. The regulatory power of norms that govern ideas about our personal experiences and worldviews disciplines individuals to view certain people and their experiences as peripheral to the mainstream and therefore less significant. Sharing experiences and views that diverge from normative perceptions on an open platform functions as a form of resistance with the power to highlight marginalised issues as collective experiences and validate concerns of marginalised femmes as important within feminist circles, and beyond. This solidarity strengthens a feminist community by creating bonds based on allyship with, and, belonging to a struggle, as @bunnymemes expressed:

"There's now double the power. Allies who speak out against injustices, and the voices of those who have been mistreated being heard" (@bunnymemes).

6.1.3 Building an Inclusive Community

Interviewing femme "memers" also elucidated some of the defining features of the meme community and shows how the community ethos reifies feminist inclusivity (RQ1). In their individual creation of relatable content that produces a mixture of empathy and humour, feminist meme creators form bonds with each other over their partaking in this common practice as a

socially and culturally diverse group of femme meme accounts. This exemplifies the inclusivity of coalitions spoken about by Fixmer and Wood; where unity is based in shared identification, rather than shared identity. Following Howard Rheingold's definition, a "virtual community" is: "a social aggregation that emerges online when people communicate with each other in a public forum for long enough, and with enough human feeling, that they form meaningful personal bonds" (Rheingold, 1998; 2016). Interviewees described the intersectional feminist meme community of femme meme account holders as a network of like-minded individuals where close bonds form and regular discussions and collaboration take place:

> "I'm friends with a lot of femme meme accounts…Because they're such awesome women who are so similar to me…I chat to them and bond over shared experiences" (@esoteric_queen).

> "the community of people who make these niche feminist memes can't really be categorized by one overarching thing because everyone's so different, but i think one thing that unites all of us is the desire to talk about and address our marginalized experiences" (@problematiqueer).

The supportive and collaborative aspects of this community reflect how Third Wave feminists are embracing social networking spaces to embody a community of like-minded women who come from different backgrounds and bring their own different perspectives to the discussion table. Fixmer and Wood's point about Third Wavers "building inclusive coalitions" demonstrates the influence of intersectionality theory on Third Wave politics.

Transgressing Historic Boundaries via Online Interactions

Interviews also provided evidence both for how these interactions via new media technologies facilitate intersectional feminist dialogue (RQ1), and provide motivation to participate (RQ2), tying into discussions (see 3.4 and 3.5) on intersectionality and new media. The building of a feminist coalition based on an identification of goals and values necessitates social interactions that provide the first person accounts for feminists to better understand each others' different struggles. Wini Breines (2002, 1122) argues that "abstract anti-racism" characterised "white feminism"; many white Second Wave feminists analysed differences by race and class but seldom interacted socially with black women (Archer Mann and Huffman, 2005, 60). As Breines argues, for feminist communities to be truly intersectional, feminists needed a political understanding of racism and a personal-political understanding of how racism affects every day lives. The Third Wave use of personal

narrative envisions multiple perspectives that can lead to the rejection of dominant ideologies and an openness to the dynamic creation of truth (Zimmerman et al, 2009, 79). For example, @ada.wrong states:

"I learn a lot from other meme accounts with different perspectives from mine. It's definitely widened my perception of the world. I would say most specifically about being darker-skinned POC [people of colour] and from lower-income backgrounds. It kind of also eclipsed talking about these things from my IRL [in real life] friends too who are mainly South East Asian and from different socio-economic backgrounds" (@ada.wrong).

This reifies an intersectional approach that not only claims to be aware of intersectional oppression but also acknowledges how different femmes experience oppression through interaction and listening to each others' experiences. Intersectionality informs Third Wavers' striving to create awareness of the multiplicity, contradiction, and interlocking systems of oppression in women's lives (Fixmer and Wood, 2005, 237) and to use this knowledge as a basis for forging collective politics. As @bunnymemes says:

"overall, the meme community has helped me become a better intersectional feminist by learning more intimately about hundreds of different lives through a very different medium" (@bunnymemes).

@problematiqueer also notes that:

"the community is geographically sprawled but familiar with each other because of and via the internet" (@problematiqueer).

Using social media therefore plays an essential role in facilitating connections between femmes from different economic, social, racial, ethnic backgrounds across geographic locations, particularly for those living in areas with lower levels of diversity. As @distressed_memes says, echoing ada.wrong's previous comments:

"I think a lot of people mainly hang out with people of the same race/sexuality as them…So we don't hear other people's voices. But the internet strips those boundaries away" (@distressed_memes).

Memes attract popularity, and popularity raises visibility. This enhanced level of visibility replaces the physical presence required in an offline setting to interact and connect with other like-minded feminists. In this way, the usage of meme pages on Instagram which acquire mass followings has been key in forging cross-cultural connections that are the foundations of an inclusive community.

In summary, relatable content encourages empathy and solidarity among Instagram content creators and their audience; the foundations necessary to recognising multiplicity among and between femmes, and forging inclusive coalitions, in the spirit of the Third Wave "embodiedness" of feminist principles. Language framing, humour styles, and intertextuality are three modes of creating relatability that were identified with the use of online observations and visual social semiotic analysis. Interviewing meme creators demonstrated that a motivation for using memes to express personal politics was to create an affinity with their followers. Memes are used for creating empathy to support those who share similar experiences, and to encourage solidarity from those who do not.

6.2. Deconstructing and Decentering Dominant Norms

Scholarship identifies Internet memes are a form of representational discourse that can subvert dominant media messages to create new meaning and act as symbolic, persuasive texts (Huntingdon, 2013; Mina, 2014).

6.2.1. Modes of Normative Deconstruction

Online observations, visual social semiotics, and interviewing elucidated how memes were used to deconstruct normative ideals and value systems (RQ1).

Using Humour and Intertextuality to "Call Out" Problematics

As Dahlgren (2009, 139) argues, humorous commentary works to "strip away artifice, highlight inconsistencies, and generally challenge the authority of official political discourse". Intersectional feminist memes deliver critique of societal norms using the "multimodality, intertextuality and reappropriation inherent to memes" (Milner, 2013b, 2364) to deconstruct and decenter dominant discourses. Rhetorical humour is frequently employed to make a point or persuade an audience about social or political issues (Decker-Maurer, 2012). Memes like this can force us to examine our own biases and perhaps-unrealised prejudices (Ibid., 23). As @goldnosering states:

"i like to call attention to popular things and how they might not be the best, despite public opinion. for example, i made a meme calling out pink/vagina imagery associated with then womens march for being essentialist and alienating to people of colour and transgender" (@goldnosering).

Lievrouw (2011, 84) notes the emotional valence of culture jamming "in the way that they deploy humour, irony, fun, play, and absurdity as a means of exposing social, political, and economic problems, attracting adherents, and moving them to action. Both humor and outrage can be effective persuasive tactics, and culture jamming seems particularly adept at combining the two" (Ibid., 84). As @goldnosering states:

"people are more likely to listen to something if it's humorous or presented under the context of humor…my memes call attention to ridiculous things in the world that sometimes should be taken more seriously, but no one will until you present it to them under the guise of humor. for starter pack memes in particular, i have quite a lot of comments saying "oh jeez this is me" and people DMing [direct messaging] me thanking me for bringing an issue to their attention…my memes, i'd like to think, help educate people to some degree" (@goldnosering).

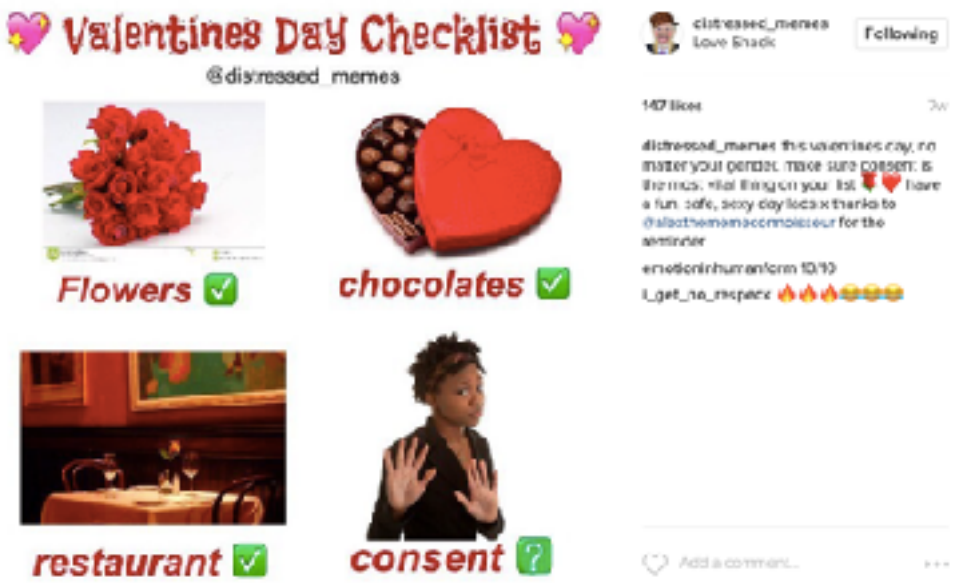
Making Use of Accessibility

Interviewing provided evidence that femme "memers" aim to speak to a wide audience which motivates their use of memes as a visual tool (RQ2). My online observations and visual semiotic analyses also support the notion that memes are used to present complex ideas in an accessible way so that they can be easily consumed and distributed, and in order for their memorability to improve their resonance and longevity. The practices and ideologies of culture-jamming, in which the re-appropriation of commercial content produces subversive meanings, are important influences on Internet memes (Bennett, 2003, in Nissenbaum and Shifman, 2015, 485). Using the language of participatory creative media (Mina, 2014, 362) memes provide a visual rupture in online discourse that can transgress traditional norms.This simplicity is key to disseminating messages to people who may be more receptive to visual and more digestible content:

"Memes are already conflating 2 forms of language/communication (images & words) to convey more complex emotions/concepts (ex #relatable content). And i feel this could be used really intentionally when talking about complex social issues that are deemed inaccessible to, let's say, someone without a liberal arts degree. Being involved in leftist organising groups, one of the problems that always comes up is how do we make these "radical" ideas accessible and "normal" to the general public. I feel like memes have the possibility to help in this instance" (@yung_nihilist).

"articles and books about marginalised experiences are fantastic but often inaccessible and/or heavy emotionally, with memes, you can convey a lived experience in a concise, familiar format that can be easily shared and often has a touch of humour to lighten it" (@problematiqueer).

@distressed_memes [see Figure 10] combines visuality and minimal use of text to convey an easily digestible message - which, in this case, reflects the simplicity of the message itself: that sexual consent is vital. Without elaborating at length on the issue, the meme manages to deliver the message by playing on the traditional expectations of a Valentine's Day date; flowers, chocolates, a restaurant table. By putting consent on the "checklist" instead of sex, the meme deconstructs the idea of sex as a natural expectation. The addition of a question mark rather than a "check" symbol where consent appears designates ambiguity - that more thought must be given to this - consent cannot be checked off like the other items, because it cannot be bought and must be given freely by a partner.



[Figure 10]

Hence, in a simple combination of images, words, and signs; the message contained is more of a complex statement to deem these material gifts to be ultimately non-essential whereas expending money, time and energy on a date can never be seen as an exchange for sex if consent is not given. An anti-capitalist feminist approach that focuses on the promotion of sexual consent ahead of Valentine's Day rather than the promotion of traditionally romantic gestures that men make perhaps with the expectation of sex in mind.

Additionally, Mina (2009, 369) recognises that memes resonate as tools of social change in repressive media environments as they "turn the tools and methods of state propaganda against itself". In Western democracies, image memes dependent on "creation, circulation, and transformation outside of traditional media gatekeepers" also provide tools for critique (Milner, 2013, 2360). In this way "populist" media artefacts can be used to articulate counter-hegemonic discourse. While mainstream media are often rightly criticised for their uncritical allegiance to the dominant political and economic order, they remain essential to reach a large audience (Cammaerts, 2007, 6). Interviewees spoke about how, because memes are mainstream media on mainstream platforms, they provide an accessible medium for the wider public to hear alternative voices and messages:

> "I think they can be effective because they're so easily digestible for some people. it's not a wordy article on a site people may not have heard of, it's like a quick read of an image usually….always on social media sites people frequent every day…I think memes are extremely accessible and thats what makes them so much more appealing and powerful than mainstream media" (@fluentfascist)

6.2.2. Making Invisible Vectors of Oppression Visible

Discussion of the intricacies of experiences of oppression is both a way in which memes can be conceptualised as feminist discourse (RQ1) and a reason for using memes to reveal such problematics (RQ2). Intersectional feminist memes work to deconstruct fixed ideas about identity by making the disciplinary forms of power that maintain their existence *visible*. By pointing out and critiquing racist, sexist and other pervasive discriminatory practices that occur at the micro-level or the structural level feminist meme creators draw attention to the normalising effects of institutions, practices and relations that are exercised in the media and in social settings. @tequilafunrise [see Figure 11] expresses the contrast between an overly-sexualised young girl and the vulnerability and discomfort the viewer gleans from her forced smile. This depiction of a child beauty pageant contestant combined with the text acts as a metaphor for the conflicting pressures to meet societal beauty standards and to uphold the feminist ideal of sisterhood. This can be read as a critique of patriarchal society's disciplining of girls (from a young age) to view other girls as competition based on looks - the most literal example of this occurring in child beauty pageants. These critiques point out ideas and actions that express normative ideas about identity categories such as gender

and race. Generating new forms of knowledge necessitates the consideration of multiple and diverse perspectives in order to dismantle normative ideas:

"making information readily available and sharable and mutable speaks to ways in which we can learn from each other, look at ways in which our oppression links up in feeling/source while also respecting the ways in which it differs in kind and magnitude" (@tequilafunrise).

[Figure 11]

Inclusiveness is a central aspect of Third Wave feminist politics, as explained by Fixmer and Wood (2005) and supported by scholars of feminism. Seeing one's experiences reflected in popular media creates feelings of inclusion, and can facilitate connections, countering the disciplinary nature of marginalisation that prevents these experiences being accounted for in mainstream media and society:

"marginalization operates in a lot of ways but one is in perpetuating the feeling of being on the margins and being alone in that, so creating communities and showing similarities of experience fights against that. also using humor to talk about identity to make it not just the grave serious shit it can come to be is so important. giving ppl [sic] also the ability to talk about what is awesome about their identities and unique about their identities, have in jokes, in a way that recenters the margins" (@tequilafunrise).

@ada.wrong [see Figure 12] comments on male attitudes towards feminism, specifically the disconnect between what men believe feminism stands for and what feminism is, as women present it. Using an image of an Asian woman fuses a feminist critique with attention to race - to underscore that feminism is not only for white women. @ada.wrong explains her use of Asian American stock characters in her images to serve as a critique of the lack of representation of Asians and women in representation in American media:

> "I want to normalise asian american femme or poc [People of Colour] immigrant background etc representation in media by just making memes about my experiences through my lens…i use stock photos of asian women because in america white representation is the default…I want to express that we live our own lives sometimes with only white people at the periphery" (@ada.wrong).

[Figure 12]

She explains how her memes served to also deconstruct gender norms within Asian communities, and so simultaneously play on normative categorisations of race and gender:

> "I use images of kpop idols [who] are often posed to appeal to male fans. I guess im using them in memes about being messy as a way to say they are also women living their lives for themselves too" (ada.wrong).

Polyvocality in Populist Discussion

Interviewing provided evidence that the polyvocal discussion of participatory culture motivated femme "memers" by offering the opportunity to gradually undo the normative ideals and

essentialisms that can be repressive to marginalised folk (RQ2). Memes are archetypal of the Web 2.0 shift to users as "produsers" (Bruns, 2007); the consumers and producers of user-generated content of the social web. The "do-it-yourself" nature of memes encourages user participation and polyvocality in populist discussion, where there is no supreme or authoritative voice. This offers opportunity for dominant narratives to be disputed.

Third Wave feminist theory is influenced by a late 20th century postmodern view of epistemology which posits that all knowledge is socially constructed and socially situated; such that all knowledge producers only have a partial or limited vantage point (Archer Mann and Huffman, 2005, 62). Therefore no one view is superior to another and any claim to having a clearer view of the truth - a so-called "masternarrative" - is a perspective that assumes dominance and privilege. Rather, polyvocality and localised mini-narratives should give voice to the multiple realities that arise from diverse social locations. This approach aims to elevate the voices of marginalised groups from the margins to the centre, thus decentering dominant discourses (Ibid, 65). As Fixmer and Wood (2005, 244) argue, many Third Wave feminists regard such localised instances of speaking out as fuelling broad social change.

Presenting a femme perspective in memes (often enhanced visually via use of images of femmes) decenters the dominant authorship of digital content produced by white men, and the dominant, often derogatory, representations of people and colour and femmes. As @yung_nihilist states:

"sometimes being a woman of color online in general challenges aspects of web culture cuz [sic] i think so much of that culture is controlled by white ppl [sic] (men)" (@yung_nihilist)

As @bunnymemes also argues:

"most memes have sexist, racist or classist undertones and are made by those who aren't living any of those struggles. I try to combat that by not following those pages, only posting content that I feel is unoffensive, and being as inclusionary as I can" (@bunnymemes).

@bunnymemes thus frames her platform use as resistance to the normative ideals that are relied on to generate humour in memes. Rather than relying on stereotypes as punchlines and general use of disparagement humour, intersectional feminist memes resist normalisation of identity in their

humour. Conversely, humour and entertainment value lies within the deconstruction of dominant ideas and presentation of personal experiences within an incongruous medium:

"if these ideas become "popular" which I feel they kind of have on Instagram, they become more accessible and ppl [sic] who may have never heard of it will be introduced to it via a non traditional platform which is more welcoming" (@yung_nihilist).

6.3. Amplifying Personal Narratives

Interviewing elucidated how feminist memes function as feminist discourse in their nature as personal narratives and perspectives (RQ1). Feminist memes function as a mode of feminist discourse in their nature as individual personal rhetoric enacted in a public online space. A key theme that arose from online observations supported by all nine interviewee statements, is the personal perspective common to most intersectional feminist memes. In such a way, they speak to particular, rather than universal audiences. This stance can be considered akin to Third Wave feminist anthology narratives depicting lived experiences and advocating emphasis on the micro-acts of oppression and micro-political acts of resistance.

As @distressed_memes states, as well as sexism, her memes focus specifically on class conflicts:

"I see a lot of classism in my life and I often feel like I can't vocalise it…Most [issues depicted in her memes] are real things that have happened to me" (@distressed_memes).

@yung_nihilist also states:

"I care deeply about intersectional feminist issues, classism, racism, etc. in my personal life and I can only make memes about things that are personal" (@yung_nihilist).

@ada.wrong argued why these personal narratives are important to vocalise:

"i want to normalise asian american femme or poc [people of colour] immigrant background etc representation in media by just making memes about my experiences through my lens…[for] people who don't have my experiences to realize that these experiences exist. and people who have similar experiences to see their lives reflected in something" (@ada.wrong).

For Foucault, resistance and power are intrinsically related; points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. For Third Wave feminists, enacting personal resistance in everyday life is a key form of feminist politics (Fixmer and Wood, 2005, 243). This form of postmodern politics envisions sites of power and resistance as located wherever dominant ideologies operate. Although personal narratives featured in the Second Wave, Third Wavers return to the personal with an altered theoretical and political framework influenced by postmodernist, poststructuralist and multiculturalist critiques of Second Wave feminism (Yu, 2011, 875). As the Third Wave placed more women of colour at the forefront of the movement, personal narratives took an important role documenting the lived experiences of women from multiple walks of life. Third Wave feminist anthologies such as those by Walker (1995), Findlen (2005) and Hernández and Rehman (2002) deliberately seek to include diverse perspectives and in doing so, encourage women to read and know diverse perspectives that extend beyond their own.

6.3.1. Resistance in/to the Every Day

As sustained articulations of individual resistance that fit within a broader perspective, feminist memes are Third Wave feminist acts of everyday resistance (RQ1), as I deduce from interviewing and semiotic analysis. As interviewing also shows, this is motivated by a desire to speak about micro-acts of oppression experienced in the everyday and with the realisation that micro-acts of resistance can be effective at creating ripples of change (RQ2). Personal narratives document the micro-politics of everyday interactions and events in different individual lives to make these experiences visible and relevant. As a femme, and as a member of a socially marginalised group, everyday life can involve experiences of micro-aggressions; subtle manifestations of discrimination can easily go ignored and unaddressed due to their normalisation within society. @tequilafunrise commented that memes had been useful for drawing attention to personal instances of oppression:

> "for me also its been great for speaking about micro-aggressions both racial and gendered…which gain their power precisely from not being seen…by making them visible and with the meme format showing their frequency" (@tequilafunrise).

@goldnosering's meme [see Figure 13] poses a rhetorical question to point it out as a micro-aggression; repeated comparisons between women of a South Asian background which they experience frequently, thus contributing to the overall "othering" of women of colour. Asking this

question reinforces the idea that women from a similar ethnic background can be grouped into a single marginalised category and this becomes their defining feature. The actual composition of these icons from popular culture (in only featuring women of colour) poses a contrast to mainstream media's lack of non-white women - therefore mirroring the critique that the meme delivers.

[Figure 13]

Interviewees spoke about carrying out activity offline in order to raise awareness and campaign on behalf of feminist causes:

"at my university i work with the LGBT and feminist clubs. i also protest/rally when i can….it would be hypocritical of me to talk about annoying protest signs if i didn't experience them first hand" (@goldnosering).

The online and the offline are conceptualised as intersecting parts of the same whole; as in the case of micro-aggressions, acts of discrimination, institutional or macro-structures of oppression. Therefore, as Foucauldian theory states, resistance to these forms of power must take place at the micro- and the macro- levels; in online spheres and offline spaces, using the physical body in and the digitalised self on social media, and how these actions are connected:

"someone told me my memes encouraged them to take place in pro-muslim protests, even though they live in a small, conservative christian town" (@goldnosering).

Being a feminist online is a personal act of resistance in itself to the everyday forms of aggression that take place against women and people of colour online. Interviewees all spoke about having received hateful, sexist and racist messages from men; and in several cases this is a regular occurrence:

"i've had to block a lot of people based on hateful comments. i blocked what i guess is a Neo-Nazi the other day. one reason i keep myself anonymous on my meme account is because of stuff like that. i know shitty, racist people will do anything to shut me down for my experiences as a person of color, and i know white supremacists in particular are pretty crafty when it comes to finding people, so for my own safety I don't post selfies or a direct geographical location or anything" (@goldnosering).

"My guess is [that] they really don't get my principles or where I'm coming from as a WOC [Woman of Colour]. Big surprise. I get a lot of that "Ur [sic] just a SJW[33] faggot liberal" "haha safe space snowflakes[34]" "feminazi" now. These are pretty much verbatim comments" (@yung_nihilist).

As @yung_nihilist notes, these actions can be traced to a sense of entitlement that comes from race, gender, and class-based identity and a disregard for others who don't share these privileges within society:

"Re: 4chan/Reddit: those sites have always been a nesting ground for Meninists and cis men who feel the world hasn't given them what they were promised. Even this "alt right" movement has roots in Reddit forums where trump supporters/men could congregate/vent about women and liberal agenda/give each other advise on how to keep their political beliefs on the down low so they're not doxxed as racists. Sometimes those men crawl out from under their 4chan rock and make their way into Twitter and Instagram. It reminds me of the quote that "equality feels like oppression to those most privileged"" (@yung_nihilist).

Feminist "memers" resist these acts of oppression by protecting themselves from harm (such as blocking users and protecting their privacy) whilst continuing to express themselves in the face of these acts, without modifying any of their stances. With regards to anonymity, Davison (2012) notes that this can enable memes to be potentially transgressive or empowering modes of communication and participation. Whilst anonymity can be useful for trolls to inflict damage without their identity being revealed, it can also serve as protection for activists standing up for their views in the face of online abusive behaviour.

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[33] "Social Justice Warrior"; a term used to insult someone promoting socially progressive views such as feminism, civil rights, multiculturalism, and identity politics.

[34] Another perjorative term used to refer to someone who is perceived to be easily offended and is often directed at young people and social progressives.

Through their memes feminists show resistance to these individual acts of repression and recognise that in doing so, they are connected to societal norms and the structures which maintain them. Building visibility and gaining a base of support online means that resistance towards the outlets of, and the systems which implement, these forms of discrimination. From my online observations, I noted how trolls were reprimanded for their abusive comments and others were "called out" for perpetrating offensive stereotypes and essentialisms, both in follower comments and as the topic of memes. Socio-economic inequalities in the offline sphere are reproduced online where powerful actors and organisations are afforded more visibility than marginalised people who do not conform to these constructed norms.

However, resisting these factors means using the means available to connect with others and build a support base to make changes possible. @bunnymemes comments on how she hopes that her memes can provide a challenge to the popular content that is spread by entitled members of society and is derogatory to women and minorities:

> "Most memes have sexist, racist, or classist undertones and are made by those who aren't living any of those struggles. I try to combat that by not following those pages, only posting content that I feel is unoffensive, and being as inclusionary as I can. Although I feel those pages will always have a mass following, I can control the content that is on my page and that I see. Hopefully that in itself makes a small difference" (@bunnymemes).

6.3.2. Resistance is Personal

Self-reflexivity

As Fixmer and Wood (2005, 242) argue "enacting personal resistance" also means locating the beginnings of the struggle in oneself and in politicising one's own body and voice. Third Wave feminism emphasises self-reflexivity; recognising and challenging internalised oppressions and the part one plays in systems of domination. Through a focus on personal narratives, the trajectory of intersectional feminist memes runs counter to the tendency to think that people from oppressed groups can be spoken for, thus depriving them of a voice and genuine validation of their concerns. Being self-reflexive means checking your own practices, as well as others'. Mainstream culture (digital and physical) has tended to freely adopt aspects of black culture, queer culture, immigrant cultures, and working class culture. Re-appropriation of this nature allows one to benefit from, without having to experience the struggles of a marginalised social group, and thus emboldens

forms of disciplinary power applied to certain groups and individuals. Patricia Hill-Collins (2009) refers to the deliberate social "blackening" of white people who adopt black culture at their leisure which effectively reinforces assumptions of privilege and the right to colonise culture. Hence, feminist "memers" acknowledge that perspective should acknowledge privilege and avoid reinforcing it to the detriment of others who may be marginalised in different ways:

"my perspective is still limited due to the privileges i do have. often times we view ourselves in the ways we are marginalized instead of the ways we are BOTH marginalized and privileged. i can only talk from what i know and from my experience" (@goldnosering).

Milner (2016) pinpoints "re-appropriation" as one of five fundamental features of memes, in terms of context; re-appropriating a meme from one context to another in a dual process of remix and spread. However, re-appropriating of memes and anonymity of meme creators combines often to display vernacular and images in memes to create the illusion of an another identity. This results in these pages gaining popularity by profiting from what is not originally theirs - a conundrum that arises when memes, black Internet culture, and anonymity result in complicit reinforcement of white male entitlement, and of the privileged exploiting the creativity of those who are not so privileged without recognition or reward for their work.

@yung_nihilist critiqued this form of re-appropriation online, referencing examples:

"[There's] a white man who runs several meme pages BUT performs "digital black face" by managing a "hood meme page that's only black twitter memes completely with use of the n word" (@yung_nihilist).

Additionally, @tequilafunrise spoke of her conscious avoidance of partaking in racist meme and re-appropriating black culture in memes:

"harambe became racist, dat boi was already racist, and i've been thinking about who gets recognition for memes and internet culture (damn daniel gets a lifetime supply of vans, the girl who created "on fleek" gets nothing) (which is also why i don't watermark my memes, try not to do trending memes which tend to come from black twitter, won't use bve [black vernacular english] for captions or black peoples bodies as images). it's just been a long conversation of in what way am i complicit in hegemonic systems that show up online still" (@tequilafunrise).

Memes and Coping

Interviews elucidated how femme “memers" are motivated to maintain their online presence because, despite the downsides it inevitably comes with, it provides forms of empowerment through cathartic nature of documenting one’s thoughts, and in generating the possibility for social and economic opportunities (RQ2). Resistance towards internalised oppressions applies to other marginalised individuals *and* oppressions toward the self. Jocelyn Taylor (1995, 233); a contributor to Rebecca Walker’s Third Wave anthology, realised she has internalised racist views and “set out to use my own body as a political tool and defy institutionalised self-hatred…The mere Black female form [is] a source of power and a symbol of resistance” (Fixmer and Wood, 2005, 242). Claiming space to voice individual experiences is in itself an act of political resistance, because giving these concerns a public platform is a statement of personal acknowledgement that they are important. @problematiqueer described that part of their resistance is in:

> “existing in a world that doesn’t expect me to thrive [and] being open about my experiences and voicing the things i believe in. vulnerability is really powerful and connects people in a way like nothing else, i think” (@problematiqueer).

@problematiqueer’s meme [see Figure 14] containing an image of the two otters plays on a common trend of featuring cute animals in memes to describe human emotions and situations (see Miltner, 2011, 2014). The otters visually represent the acts of self-care and peer support within communities in the face of oppression, to correspond with the accompanying text which emphasises “self-care as an act of resistance”. Emphasis on self-care echoes black queer feminist and civil rights activist Audre Lorde’s (1988, 131) mantra of self-care “as self-preservation” and “an act of political warfare”. The use of animals in image macros can be remarkably useful for expressing feelings. As Miltner (2014) notes, these memes are fundamentally a storytelling medium that can humorously capture the ups and downs of the human condition. Memes, then, in various ways, can provide a cathartic medium to verbalise difficult subjects and emotions when expressed in a more abstract and comical form:

> “i was in pre-rehab, and also like had felt so alienated for a while due to keeping my eating disorder and assault secret from most people that i was craving this kind of like universalization? making oneself relatable? finding particularity in abstraction maybe? and humor has also always been a means of coping for me since i was a kid” (@tequilafunrise).

[Figure 14]

Social Capital

In cultivating an Internet persona and following, feminist meme creators actively use the tools of digital culture to raise their profile. As a form of cultural capital on the social web (Nissenbaum and Shifman, 2014) the popularity of successful meme pages brings the creator some level of online notoriety which can translate into self-empowerment in everyday life. Cultural capital is particularly sought after and valuable on platforms Instagram and Twitter, where the majority of users are younger and more in tune with digital culture and popular culture. To many Instagram users, gathering thousands of followers can be a motivating force (Marwick, 2015, 137). As Marwick (2015) notes, online popularity is considered a valuable asset in a media-saturated, information-rich online world.

"I've gained confidence because it really is validating to have ppl [sic] think you're funny/interesting/smart…On the social capital tip: I've def [sic] gained networking opportunities bcuz other ppl who I follow and admire might now think I'm cool….So there's opportunities to collaborate and create with others once u have a platform/significant following" (@yung_nihilist).

"it's tremendously helped me forge my politics and also helped me in coming to terms with my own gender identity and sexuality. I don't think I'd have come to understand so much about myself without the people I've met online and in a way without memes" (@fluentfascist).

6.4. “Embodied Politics” in the Instagram Era

Having elaborated on how and why memes are used as a mode of feminist discourse on social media, I argue that memes can blend personal and political perspectives to increase the visibility of these concerns. On a virtual platform, feminist memes construct the “personal and often physical, bodily action that aims to provoke change by exercising and resisting power in everyday life” (Fixmer and Wood, 2005, 237). Whilst previous studies have proven that memes can be political, this study demonstrates that the aims and motives of meme creators can be at once political and personal. By creating solidarity, deconstructing norms, and envisioning power and resistance in the everyday, feminist memes reify the personal *as* the political. Whilst “embodied politics” are visible in today’s feminist online discourse, I depart from Fixmer and Wood when they pinpoint a fundamental disconnection between Third Wave thought and Foucault’s notion of “disciplinary power”. Fixmer and Wood (2005, 236) argue that, whilst Third Wavers adopt Foucault’s realisation that power is imposed, resisted and negotiated in “tiny, everyday” practices, they “seem almost exclusively interested in disciplinary power to the neglect of juridicial power… disregarding Foucault’s understanding that the two forms of power work together.”

This is because applying “embodied politics” to today’s digital feminist practices means accounting for the differences between how power can be envisioned in a pre-digital era and digital era. As Kinser (2004, 133) argues, what is most influential in defining the Third Wave is its position relative to the current socio-cultural, technological, and political climate. Feminism has historically evolved in tandem with society to adapt to evolving systems of power. The Third Wave became more pop culture-conscious, identifying how popular media reinforced sexism (see c.6, Aune and Redferne, 2013). The 1990s saw the growth of popular feminist magazines such as *BUST* and *Bitch*, that began to actively challenge media representations and create counter-presentations (Siegel and Baumgardner, 2007, 147). In the same decade, the “Riot Grrrl" movement also developed support women in music and art, spawning a thriving D.I.Y. subculture. Consequently, today’s digital feminists, whilst maintaining Third Wave values, have adopted their practices and perspectives to a nuanced analysis of power that is applicable to today’s hyper-mediated environment. Contemporary online feminism acknowledges that the online and the offline are relational; that disciplinary and judicial power mutually inform each other; that the micro- and the macro-political are intrinsically related. Today, it is more apparent than ever that digital culture can successfully shape real world

events, politics, and social and material life (see chapter two), and online participatory discourse can be powerful:

> "it puts some power into the hands of regular people who may not have the privilege of seeing themselves reflected in the media. The whole concept of "black twitter" is one that media companies wish they could harness and be able to use its vitality. But they just don't realize that those memes are successful because they're made by real people not corporations" (@yung_nihilist).

As Cammaerts (2007, 18) comments with reference to jamming techniques, political actors and companies have attempted to use memes "as a 'hip' communication strategy…unjamming the jam so to speak". Like their ability to shape consumer habits, memes can shape citizens' political behaviour and consequently inform political process:

> "memes are like the latest unfiltered means of promoting ideas on a large scale. it's like pirate radio or something…I think they can work in the way that propaganda has worked in the past…in a weird way memes got Donald Trump elected so that's kinda saying something" (@fluentfascist).

Hence, Fixmer and Wood's (2005, 245) argument that "third wave politics appear to be almost exclusively concerned with personal forms of resistance and struggle" should be re-addressed. Feminists today recognise the importance of change on an interpersonal, institutional and judicial level. Rather, the "tiny everyday" moments continue to be important to feminists *because* they have now taken on greater significance:

> "we've seen memes make songs reach the top charts and random people become famous. As humans we're easily persuaded by the media we ingest. If the media we're ingesting is intersectional and challenging societal norms, I think we will too" (@bunnymemes).

7. Discussion

Throughout this thesis, I identify memes as an interesting technological phenomenon, but specifically draw attention to how they can act as a portal to inform us on society and our relationship to this technology. At its core, this thesis centers on a small-scale study of a community of feminist meme creators on Instagram, encompassed by a broader reflection on the contemporary memescape in today's digital culture, and its convergence with material life.

7.1 Reviewing the Research Questions

I return here to the aim and research questions: **RQ1) How are memes used as a feminist mode of discourse?** and **RQ2) What are the aims and motives of the producers of feminist memes?** and draw attention to the categories by which I identify this online work as feminist "embodied politics" that resists "disciplinary power" through "jamming" the media. I categorise both research questions into three over-arching themes; creating empathy and solidarity (6.1); deconstructing and decentering dominant norms (6.2); and, amplifying personal narratives (6.3).

With regards to **RQ1**, I outline the modes by which memes are used as a feminist mode of discourse. Firstly, feminist memes use modes of relatability to engage with others and form bonds; using the modes of humour; language framing; intertextuality and popular culture, in combination with the use of emotional resonance. Secondly, this content also works to deconstruct societal norms and claim visibility for marginalised issues using modes of normative deconstruction. Making use of humour and intertextuality to "call out" problematics; of memes as an accessible medium to reach audiences; and as polyvocal participatory objects, feminist "memers" use the transgressive nature of the medium to critique and discuss. Thirdly, through an individual and personal form of expression, this content also centers on the micro-political that comes from everyday experiences in order to emphasise the significance that small acts of power and resistance can have in a hyper-connected world.

With regards to **RQ2**, I outline the aims and motives of feminist "memers" in terms of how they relate to a feminist standpoint. Firstly, using modes of relatability, feminist "memers" aim to generate empathy between people with similar experiences, whilst encouraging those without such

experiences to recognise their privileges and express their solidarity with others. Secondly, by decentering and deconstructing dominant norms, they aim to make visible the unseen ways in which oppression can work and to inform audiences on how to resist complicity and deference. Thirdly, through a personal form of resistance, this community stands for diversity and inclusivity, self-acceptance, self-reflexivity and memes are also used as a form of coping and to continue to build online social capital that can be beneficiary both personally and politically.

Limitations

Of course, in addressing these research questions, it must be acknowledged that this study is inevitably limited in terms of reliability due to the subjective nature of qualitative research. I have elaborated here on my own findings yet it is possible that replicating the study myself or by another researcher would produce slight variations in results. The methodological components of this ethnographic approach are limited in that they are based on my interpretations of data derived from interviewing, observing, and semiotic analysis. Additionally, given the scope of this thesis, it was not possible to carry out in-depth qualitative analysis of a large amount of online content and I had to be selective with the content I chose to study in greater depth. Moreover, digital culture moves quickly, and the ephemeral nature of memes means that they are in a constant state of evolution. The findings of this study therefore must not be taken as static, but as a close representation of a feminist Instagram meme community at present and an indicator of how memes and contemporary feminist work can intersect in the online social world.

7.2. Implications: Reviewing the Current "Memescape"

Participatory culture has been heralded for subverting traditional power relations and giving voice to people through new and unique means (Rintel, 2013, in Miltner, 2014). However, memes also have the power to co–opt and silence (Ibid.). Reviewing the contemporary digital landscape elucidates the tendencies for memes, like other social texts, to reproduce societal norms based on existing hierarchies. Historically, online collectives in Western contexts have been discursively male-dominated, white and privileged (Milner, 2012, 41-43). This constructed centrality of white masculinity in participatory collectives leads to oppressive ideologies targeting femme-identifying people and people of colour. Even in jokes, inequality is discursively reproduced (Ibid., 42).

Previous studies on memes have tended to explore why particular memes have become popular[35]. Recently, right wing and conspiracy groups have aroused the interest of academics and popular media for their use of memes to forward false narratives and bigotry (see for example, Singal, 2016; *The Economist*, 2016b; Read, 2017). Additionally, it is often the perceived "feminising" forces that receive a particularly intense backlash from content-oriented communities who view their texts or set of texts as being corrupted by "outsiders" (Ibid., see also Nagle, 2016). Conflicts over control and legitimacy are taking place all over the Internet, and at their core are entrenched disparities of power and voice (Miltner, 2014).

As Philips (2017) argues, bigotry tends to be abstract by nature and hence this has resonated so well within online collectives; for example, "[to] lump everybody under the single category of Mexicans and say they are rapists, which is what Donald Trump did…[is] an easier sentiment to memeify because it's just a nebulous statement that people can bring their own bigotries to" (Ibid.). The possibility for democratic participation in online spaces emboldens these usages, but also "gives anti-fascists, anti-racists - people who are just not accepting this reality - a way of speaking back" (Ibid.). Hence, liberals or progressives typically try to combat this abstraction with specifics (Ibid.).

[Figure 15]

[35] For examples, see Miltner, 2011; Vickery, 2013; Milner, 2013a; Milner 2013b; Milner 2013c; Miltner, 2014.

The findings of this study certainly show that - contrary to impersonality, to abstraction, to bigotry - feminists create resonance with others online with personal vulnerability, which, as Butler argues, should be considered a condition for the possibility of resistance. As Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay (2016, 4) argue, masculine positions are effectively built through a denial of their own vulnerability - this denial or disavowal requires one to forget one's own vulnerability and project, displace and localise it elsewhere. When nations advertise their hyper-vulnerability to new immigrants, or men openly fear that they are now the victims of feminism, the recourse to "vulnerability" in such instances can become the basis for a policy that seeks to exclude or contain women or minorities (Ibid., 4).

As memes continue to be used in novel and impactful ways, it is important to make sense of these various usages within online communities. This study contributes to this field of study by demonstrating the articulation and shaping of a cultural agenda by an intersectional feminist Instagram community. Here I do not attempt to evaluate the potential "success" of memes in terms of spread and notoriety, but put forward the notion that memes may serve as discursive feminist rhetoric that can be differentiated from other topical memes of interest. itself from other meme logics. Phillips (2017) contends that, "memes need to be abstract, disconnected from specific experiences so that more people can latch on and do their thing with it". While this may be the case for memes to achieve widespread notoriety, memes are multi-faceted objects which, this study has shown, can resemble deep and personal practices of meaning-making. Meme collectives are slowly coming to resemble the diversity and complexity of participatory groups and individuals in the offline world. Therefore, media researches on memes as practices of meaning-making within online communities can certainly benefit from other disciplines and approaches such as ethnography, to understand the contexts of their production, distribution, and reception.

7.3 Further Implications: Feminism as a Meme

Previous research highlighted the ways in which current feminist movements are making use of new media, and how the broadening of the conversation is, in various ways, informing an increasingly intersectional focus. Social media's broadening of public participation can serve as a continuous reminder that the concerns of a*ll* femme-identifying folk are important to the crux of the movement; including (and especially) those who have been previously sidelined for being; poor, non-white, a

member of a religious faith, queer, transgender, young, old, disabled, mentally or physically ill, a sex worker, or lacking a high level of formal education.

As previously discussed, using memes to promote feminism can be considered oppositional and subversive given the lineage of meme culture and the ideological notions of privilege, entitlement and supremacy embedded within many memes today. Memes are also an innovative medium for which to channel feminism given feminism's stigmatisation in popular culture - by being frequently associated with joyless, humourless, man-hating femmes. Unsurprisingly, feminists and feminism are often the targets of derogatory memes (Trakilović, 2013**)**.

Feminist and queer studies scholar, Sara Ahmed (2010), argues that the "feminist killjoy" stereotype arises as a result of normative associations between femininity and happiness; associations which are used to justify unequal divisions in labour and restrictive gender roles.[36] Within this framework, feminists are stigmatised because they refuse the imperative to be happy. Happiness, in Ahmed's analysis, can be likened to acceptance and self-governance; therefore, connecting with Foucault's disciplinary power. On the one hand, the feminists in this study refuse happiness with the the status quo, whilst their use of humour reverses the "killjoy" stereotype. This does not refuse actual happiness, but rather the constructed notion of happiness which femmes are expected to adopt. As Ahmed (2010, 65) argues, in "killing joy" feminists "expose the bad feelings that get hidden, displaced, or negated" under public signs of happiness. Debunking the myth of the "feminist killjoy", feminist "memers" create their own shared laughter:

> "One of the things I really love about the community is the celebration of female humour. So much of online humour is curated by men. But women are SO funny" (@esoteric_queen, 11.03.2017)

Far from the image of feminism as secluded and one-sided, feminist memes show that a single definition of feminism is impossible to pinpoint (Trakilović, 2013). For feminists to articulate feminist theory in memes, speaks not only to the power of memes as complex communication tools but also to digital feminists' ability to navigate both the opportunities and problems of social media (see Fotopoulou, 2016a). In this sense, feminism is memetic - powerful; participatory; undergoing constant evolution and adaptation to ensure its continued relevance.

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[36] For a deeper discussion of what is meant by a "feminist killjoy" see Ahmed (2017); "A Killjoy Survival Kit" and "A Killjoy Manifesto".

7.4 Final Remarks and Future Research Agendas

On the surface, Internet memes may appear shallow or insignificant - but while they often lack seriousness they are a distinctive product of current digital culture and typify many of its underlying qualities (Nissenbaum and Shifman, 2014, 484). Memes, as I and other scholars have shown, can have a veritable impact on social and political life, both in the online and offline public spheres. Terms like "Nasty Women" are now being adopted back and forth between contexts for different purposes, from online subculture forums to feminist hashtags, memes and blogposts, to protest placards in political demonstrations (for example, figures 1-4). Media scholars should thus continue to study memes as political objects rather than as mere inconsequential humour. Ample opportunity exists for scholars from a number of social and political fields to explores memes as tools of communication. This includes but is not limited to: feminist studies, African American studies, queer politics, political movements against state authoritarianism (following Mina, 2014; Bratich, 2014; Huntingdon, 2016), anti-austerity and anti-capitalism movements (following Milner, 2012, 2013b), and environmental movements (following Davis et al, 2016).

Scholarship should also be agile to respond to how digital culture is impacting, and being impacted on, by user demographics - and how this is shaping online discourse. Until several years ago, power-users were composed of highly-educated, tech-savvy middle classes living in Western countries[37]. However as the Internet's reach has expanded, clusters of Internet users have formed with their own distinct micro-cultures. Moreover, digital culture is a constantly evolving set of cultures and practices, responding to and shaping real world events. Online observations and interviewing revealed the relative newness of the feminist meme community. When they were asked around when they began posting memes to their account, all interviewees responded mid- or late 2016. During my online observations, I noted the growth of similar meme accounts on Instagram. @bunnymemes also commented that:

[37] Milner (2016) discusses this in detail in relation to memes, outlining three eras in which "meme" is used as a descriptor by different sets of people:
- The late 1990s; memes are used by very niche interest groups in small pockets of conversation where all participants are generally white, male technocrats. Technological literacy, economic income and leisure time were a requirement for meme community participation.
- The mid 2000s; participation is broader but the term is still relatively esoteric - subcultures on sites like 4chan, Reddit, and eventually Tumblr and Twitter begin to use memes - often in the style of trolling, play and remix.
- 2011/12 onwards; "memes" garner massive national interest - they refer less strictly to subcultures and more to the general idea of cultural transmission. Tools allow for even easier remix and buzzing conversations (Milner, 2016).

> “from when I first started to now there must be at least 50 new pages with similar themes of mental health, intersectional feminism, and anti-capitalism. It's a really cool experience to see them start and grow in different ways” (@bunnymemes).

Therefore, this study highlights the recent development of a new feminist practice using the tools of new media and digital culture. As Mina (2012) comments, when memes are used for social-political purposes, “it reflects how a global generation steeped in the idiosyncrasies of Internet culture can bring that culture to bear on serious social issues”. Future studies should continue to explore unorthodox means of political participation that make use of digital culture, and other (perhaps multimodal) means of online participation. Whilst what can be conceived of as political participation in the digital age is broadening, alternative media practices are still under-represented in media and communications studies (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008; Fuchs, 2010). Furthermore, in relation to feminist practices, I hope to underline that - particularly within online participatory culture - an intersectional feminist approach constitutes not the *doing* of specific political actions per say, but the *embodiment* of a set of integral values in one’s practices. As Rentschler and Schrift (2015b, 246) find, networked feminist practices can be “mediated modes of techné"; “ways of doing feminism that do not look or feel like traditional social movement activism but which are central to feminist movement building and ideologies.”

8. References

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Figures

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Figure 2. @KiaraLynne_ (2017) *Twitter* [https://twitter.com/KiaraLynne__/status/822838399275044865?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.buzzfeed.com%2Fjuliareinstein%2Fbest-womens-march-signs] in Reinstein, Julia (2017) 61 of the Greatest Signs from the Women's Marches around the Country. *Buzzfeed* (21 January 2017) [https://www.buzzfeed.com/juliareinstein/best-womens-march-signs?utm_term=.flkDEYZLo#.siQ9D2wGW].

Figure 3. @adamjk (2017) *Twitter* [https://twitter.com/adamjk/status/822895990009106433?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.buzzfeed.com%2Fjuliareinstein%2Fbest-womens-march-signs] in Reinstein (2017).

Figure 4. @jauregzus (2017) *Twitter* [https://twitter.com/RlHANTl/status/822860118371004416?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.buzzfeed.com%2Fjuliareinstein%2Fbest-womens-march-signs] in Reinstein (2017).

Figure 5. *KnowYourMeme* (2017) "Alt Right Pepe" [http://knowyourmeme.com/search?context=images&q=pepe+alt+right].

Figure 6. Appendix N: p.97 in Miltner, Kate (2011) Srsly Phenomenal: An Investigation into the Appeal of LOLcats. Master Thesis. Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, U.K.

Figure 7. *KnowYourMeme* (2010) "Successful Black Man" [http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/successful-black-man].

Figure 8. @yung_nihilist (2017) *Instagram* [https://www.instagram.com/p/BQRXsjNhw8G/?taken-by=yung_nihilist].

Figure 9. @esoteric_queen (2016) *Instagram* [https://www.instagram.com/p/BMDq2x6B1FS/?taken-by=esoteric_queen].

Figure 10. @distressed_memes (2017) *Instagram* [https://www.instagram.com/p/BQdXvjvjOB8/?taken-by=distressed_memes].

Figure 11. @tequilafunrise (2016) *Instagram* [https://www.instagram.com/p/BIQPYKtjhO3/?taken-by=tequilafunrise].

Figure 12. @ada.wrong (2016) *Instagram* [https://www.instagram.com/p/BMZO4fzhOI8/?taken-by=ada.wrong].

Figure 13. @goldnosering (2017) *Instagram* [https://www.instagram.com/p/BR3wYTxBKwX/?taken-by=goldnosering].

Figure 14. @problematiqueer (2017) *Instagram* [https://www.instagram.com/p/BP6O0zrDuOX/?taken-by=problematiqueer].

Figure 15. @brownmilf (2017) *Instagram* [https://www.instagram.com/p/BTUypL-AV1D/?taken-by=brownmilf].

9. Appendix I. Instagram Accounts

The following Instagram users participated in in-depth interviews and provided content for visual social semiotic analysis:

@ada.wrong (2017). *Instagram*. https://www.instagram.com/ada.wrong/ [interview date: 05.02.2017].

@bunnymemes (2017). *Instagram*. https://www.instagram.com/bunnymemes/ [interview date: 20.02.2017].

@distressed_memes (2017). *Instagram*. https://www.instagram.com/distressed_memes/ interview date: 20.03.2017].

@esoteric_queen (2017). *Instagram*. https://www.instagram.com/esoteric_queen/ [interview date: 11.03.3017].

@fluentfascist (2017). *Instagram*. https://www.instagram.com/fluentfascist/ [interview date: 21.02.2017].

@goldnosering (2017). *Instagram.* https://www.instagram.com/goldnosering/ [interview date: 03.02.2017].

@problematiqueer (2017). *Instagram.* https://www.instagram.com/problematiqueer/ [interview date: 30.03.2017].

@tequilafunrise (2017). *Instagram*. https://www.instagram.com/tequilafunrise/ [interview date: 14.03.2017].

@yung_nihilist (2017). *Instagram*. https://www.instagram.com/yung_nihilist/ [interview date: 19.02.2017].

Appendix II. Correspondence with Interviewees

Invitation to Interview (via Instagram direct message):

"Hi there! My name is Caitlin Breheny and I'm a British student currently doing my masters degree in Digital Media and Society at Uppsala University. I'm writing my thesis on digital culture - specifically, memes as a vehicle for delivering political messages and as a means of self-expression. I'm interested in how femme meme creators are redefining the content and stance of memes so that the medium becomes a tool for raising women's voices, and the voices of other marginalised groups online - a subject which I think is deserving of attention within academia.Therefore, I have selected a number of Instagram accounts that I think really demonstrate these qualities and I'm interested to hear your thoughts. I would like to ask for your permission to conduct an interview with you for my study. If you could let me know whether you would be happy to participate, I would be so grateful. The interview would be online via Instant Messenger and, of course, if you want to remain anonymous that would be guaranteed. Thanks in advance! Caitlin."

Interview Disclosure (via email)

- "My finished project will be posted online to a Swedish website called diva-portal.org where research publications and student theses are archived - so the information will be publicly available.
- Therefore, if I may use your Instagram username and/or first name I will add that to your answers, but if you want to be anonymous that's also totally fine. Whatever you're more comfortable with.
- I've estimated the interview should take no longer than 60 mins
- As this is completely voluntary, you can say at any point if you don't want to answer something or want to end the interview.

N.B. All of this is just standard protocol but don't worry - no questions will be intrusive and essentially just revolve around your thoughts on social media, memes and feminism.
Thanks again for your co-operation :)."

Appendix III. Interview Guide

1. Around when did you start to make memes for your Instagram?

2. Why did you begin to create memes? Was there anything in particular that inspired you to do so?

3. What particular issues do you want to raise with memes?

4. How do you see memes as being an effective medium to express these ideas?

5. What would usually inspire you to make a meme from it?

6. Do you participate in any other offline or online activity to to raise awareness of the same issues as your memes?

7. Do you consider yourself to be an (intersectional) feminist? If so, can you expand on what that definition means to you?

8. Why is intersectionality theory important in today's society?

9. How do you think that social media can enable people to make their voices heard for these causes?

10. Do you think memes are a viable means for inciting social change?

11. Do you see memes as a medium that can be used to challenge aspects of society and/or the media?

12. Do you see your memes as responding to or challenging other aspects of web culture?

13. What kind of (positive and/or negative) reactions do you get from the memes you make?

14. Do you see your memes as an individualistic practice or as part of a broader community/ movement of people doing the same?

15. What do you feel you have personally gained or have learnt from making memes/being part of this community?

16. Do you have any questions or anything else you would like to add?

17. Would you like to remain anonymous? If not, would you be happy to provide the following details about yourself? (all are completely optional)

First name, Location (country and/or city), Age, Occupation.