

Girl Bloggers: Posthumanism and Girls' Online Activism

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore the complexity of young women's online activism through analysis of five blogs and online interviews with three of the bloggers. Informed by Karen Barad's approach to posthumanism, I examine how specific material-discursive entanglements around girlhood, youth and activism co-constitute meanings and experiences of activism and activist subjectivities. Four themes and various subthemes emerged from my analysis. First, the blogging process is complex, involving various entangled materialities (e.g. art, wifi, laptops, notebooks), space, time and discourses around what makes a "good" blogger. Second, the format and content of the blogs, as well as the bloggers' narratives, illustrate tensions and similarities between mobilizing an online gendered activist subjectivity and social media influencer (i.e. micro-celebrity) subjectivity within a broader neoliberal culture focused on entrepreneurship and individual success. The young women's comments highlight the ways that neoliberal girl power narratives underpin expectations of activist bloggers. Third, young women engaged in activism on their blogs and on other connected social media accounts, where they represented activism through individualized approaches, and more rarely, as involving broader systemic critique. The young women conceptualized activism broadly, although their discussions of activist blogging and self-identification as activists were messy and contextual. The final theme considers how intersecting social positionings (e.g. gender, race, class, age, disability) shape access to and experiences with activist blogging. Overall, the aim of this project is to offer a rethinking of young women's activism blogging that attends to the force of entangled material-discursive contexts.

Keywords: online activism, youth, girlhood, posthumanism

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Chapter One: Introduction

As a pre-teen girl, I remember asking my parents if I could join Tumblr, a blogging platform that many of my peers were using. During my first encounter with Tumblr, I was struck by the use of aesthetically beautiful photographs, inspirational quotations and reflections that read like diaries to talk about growing up, being a pre-teen girl and other “taboo” topics such as feminism that we did not talk about in middle or high school. I told my parents I would use Tumblr to learn about things like feminism and social justice, and not for personal photo-sharing. My parents did not understand what Tumblr was and did not think it was something I needed to be a part of, largely out of fear for my online safety. As a result, I spent my teenage years writing in diaries and notebooks, and learning about feminism and social justice by watching TED Talks or reading articles published on the website UpWorthy. I knew that my peers were doing “cool” things on Tumblr, and that there were opportunities to learn about social inequality and social justice in these spaces, something I desperately wanted to be a part of. My interest in young women’s online social justice activism stems from my own introduction to activism in my teenage years, as well as my teenaged (and current) curiosity about Tumblr and blogging among young people, especially activists.

Stemming from my earliest encounters with Tumblr and online feminist activism, I am curious about how material things, including the artifact of a blog, come to matter in the lives of young people. More specifically, I have a fascination with the complexity of activist blogging and how various material “things,” including the internet, social media, computers, cellphones, wifi, bedrooms, desks, readers and brand sponsorships come together in complex ways to generate the possibilities for the blogging practice. How do material “things” and ideas around activism, activists, girlhood and growing up, enmesh to co-produce the experiences and

meanings of young women's activist blogging? This question is at the heart of this thesis and grew out of my earliest desires and yearnings to have a Tumblr blog as a pre-teen. The anecdote about Tumblr that I have shared at the beginning of this project illuminates that the Tumblr space and blogs have affective force; they have weight because they meant something to me as a pre-teen girl curious about exploring feminism, social justice and activism. There is a growing body of research about young women's online social justice activism (e.g. Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2019; Keller, 2016), however, most research is centered on the human and considers materialities (i.e. technology, blogs) as tools used by humans. The scholarship on young women's online activism tends to adopt critical, humanist approaches as well as poststructural frameworks. St. Pierre (2019) explains that humanist social science inquiry relies on a "two-world ontology," centered on recognition and representation, wherein agentic humans understand and make meaning in the world by applying similar concepts to recognizable phenomenon. By centering on the human, humanist perspectives on young women's online activism overlook the ways that materialities are forces in and of themselves with effects for co-constituting their activism. In this project, I draw on Karen Barad's (2007) approach to posthumanism to consider materialities as forces that are entangled with discourses to co-produce meanings of, and possibilities for, young women's online social justice activism.

Theoretical Framework: A Baradian Approach to Posthumanism

Before discussing my thesis in detail, it is necessary to provide an overview of the theoretical framework that is at the foundation of this research. I begin by explaining some key characteristics of posthumanism and providing a brief summary of some of the various approaches. Next, I discuss some general critiques of posthumanism, including how posthuman theorists are responding to these critiques. The rest of this section engages with Karen Barad's

approach to posthumanism, the approach that shapes my thinking in this project. I conclude by outlining some specific critiques of Barad's framework, and my personal justification for employing this theory to better understand girls' and young women's online social justice activism.

Posthumanism, like poststructuralism, problematizes essentialist, humanist assumptions that position humans as the centre of all social life, and separate from the historical-socio-cultural contexts around them (Barad, 2003; 2007; Pomerantz & Raby, 2018). Like poststructuralism, posthumanism also challenges the humanist focus on individual rights that has been deployed in exclusionary ways, for example towards people of colour, queer people, Indigenous people, women, people with disabilities, and children (Barad, 2003; 2007). Differing from humanism and poststructuralism, a posthuman approach focusses on decentering humans in research and considers how both materialities and discourses shape meaning, which Barad (2003) argues cannot be viewed as separate entities (Barad, 2007; Herbrechter, 2013; Hickey-Moody, 2013; Pomerantz & Raby, 2018). Barad explains the inseparability of materiality and discursive practices, arguing that "the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity" (2003, p. 822). Thus, unlike a poststructural approach that considers how meanings and identities are navigated within discursive constraints, posthuman analyses emphasize the importance of materiality as an enlivened, active, productive force (Barad, 2003; 2007; Pomerantz & Raby, 2018). By doing so, a posthuman analysis views the world as co-constituting material entities, bodies and phenomena (Barad, 2003; 2007; Pomerantz & Raby, 2018).

Francesca Ferrando (2013) argues that posthumanism is commonly used as an umbrella term to refer to many different movements of thought, including new materialism,

transhumanism, critical posthumanism and posthumanities. Fox and Alldred (2017) explain that new materialist approaches, such as posthumanism, articulate how the material world is open and dynamic, challenge the separation of culture and nature, and advocate for a conceptualization of agency beyond the human. There are various approaches to posthumanism with different emphases in the analysis (see Fox & Alldred, 2017). For instance, Latour focuses on extending the realm of the social to include materialities and considers how various heterogeneous elements come together to produce aggregations, including nation states and social institutions (Fox & Alldred, 2017). Latour argues that these aggregations are the result, rather than the cause, of interactions between elements. Fox and Alldred explain that Deleuze and Guattari's approach centers on how assemblages of bodies – human and non-human – produce affects that create perpetual transformation. These constantly shifting and contextual networks enact “micropolitical consequences for bodies and for social formations” (2007, p. 18). Rosi Braidotti offers a critique of anthropocentrism through an analysis concerned with the materiality of bodies and assemblages of becoming. Braidotti argues that assemblages of becoming include elements from the natural and social worlds and allow for a discussion of subjectivities that challenge ‘othering’ discourses in modernism and humanism (Fox & Alldred, 2017). Through assemblages of becoming, bodies and subjectivities that are ‘othered’ in modernity and humanism are viewed as positive alternatives, critiquing majority/minority, man/woman and human/animal dualisms (Fox & Alldred, 2017).

Posthuman and new materialist approaches have faced criticism. For example, they have been critiqued for narrowly casting postmodern and poststructuralist thinking as “relativist” and “anti-realist,” for recycling already existing theoretical frameworks and for presuming a specific knowledge of matter (e.g. Bruining, 2016). There are also tensions between posthumanism and

some feminist theories (e.g. Ahmed, 2008). For example, Ahmed (2008) is critical of posthuman and new materialist thinkers that suggest that these ‘new’ approaches are the needed solutions to address anti-biological thinking in feminist theory. Ahmed suggests that posthuman and new materialist theorizing that calls for a “return to matter” presumes that matter has been missing from previous feminist theorizing, without acknowledging how “matter matters in different ways, for different feminisms, over time” (2008, p. 36) In response to this critique, Davis (2014) argues that all theorizing is intimately shaped by past thinking. Davis asks, “might new materialism, rather than signifying a dismissal of feminism’s legacies, instead indicate a reconfiguring of this inheritance and an opening up of new possibilities?” (2014, p. 63). Jackson (2015) is also critical of movements “beyond the human,” specifically, their dismissal of the role of race and racialization in conceptualizations of “human.” Jackson asks “what and crucially whose conception of humanity are we moving beyond?” (2015, p. 215). Posthuman and new materialist analyses have also been critiqued by postcolonial feminist thinkers who argue that much of the science (e.g. physics, biology) that posthuman and new materialist scholars engage with is the same science that postcolonial feminist scholars and activists trouble (e.g. Willey, 2016). Willey (2016) asserts the need for posthuman and new materialist theorizing to acknowledge various established approaches to sciences and the natural world, including postcolonial knowledges.

For the purpose of this project I draw on Karen Barad’s approach to posthumanism, as outlined in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, published by Duke University Press in 2007. As a quantum physicist and feminist philosopher, Barad offers a compelling posthuman ontological, epistemological and ethical framework. Barad’s use of quantum physics in her theoretical framework distinguishes

her approach to posthumanism from those explained earlier. In her theorizing, Barad argues that her “use of ‘posthumanism’ marks a refusal to take the distinction between ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’ for granted, and to found analyses on this presumably fixed and inherent set of categories” (2007, p. 32). In what follows, I will explain the key concepts of a Baradian approach to posthumanism, which I use to understand young women’s blogs, including intra-activity, agential cuts and posthuman performativity. Next, I will highlight how other scholars are mobilizing Barad’s theory and engage with some of the critiques of her framework. I will conclude this section by justifying my use of Barad’s theoretical approach to posthumanism, outlining what it offers to rethinking young women’s blogs and youth’s activism more broadly.

Barad’s intra-active approach was inspired by Neil Bohr’s quantum physics, specifically wave-particle theory. According to Bohr, objects cannot be separated from their entangled observation (Barad, 2003). Bohr noted how the tools of observation shaped the appearance of photons, specifically whether they became waves or particles (Barad 2003). Barad uses Bohr’s wave-particle theory to highlight the need to consider how the specificity of the configuration shapes the meanings and boundaries produced within the entanglement. Barad argues that outside of these entanglements, meanings attached to “things” and the words used to describe them are indeterminate. Thus, an intra-active approach challenges the assumption that matter, meanings and discourses are separate, individuated entities (Barad, 2007). Instead, intra-actions between material-discursive contexts constantly shift possibilities and barriers, which Barad argues should be understood as “constraining but not determining” meanings and boundaries (2007, p. 177). Applying the concept of intra-activity requires challenging the notion that boundaries and hierarchies are fixed and pre-determined, and instead recognizing that “boundaries do not sit still” but are reconfigured through material-discursive entanglements,

which shape what comes to matter (Barad, 2007, p. 171). By focusing on intra-actions between bodies-objects-space-time, Barad challenges human exceptionalism and avoids privileging certain phenomenon over others. Emphasizing the power and significance of materiality, Barad resists the framing of materialities as passive objects that humans use and takes up the idea that materiality is enlivened by its active participation in shaping meanings and boundaries

Barad explains intra-activity by distinguishing *interactions from intra-actions* (2003; 2007). In contrast to *interactions*, which focus on how pre-existing, distinct ideas and “things” shape meanings and outcomes, intra-activity posits that meanings and “things” do not pre-exist each other in an ontological hierarchy, but rather are created within entanglements of bodies-objects-space-time (Barad, 2003; 2007). In this way, meanings and boundaries are created from within rather than outside of material entanglements. Barad argues that an *interactive* approach assumes there are individual agencies that exist prior to an interaction, whereas an intra-active approach asserts that “agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement, they don’t exist as individual elements” (2007, p. 33). Entanglements are very specific configurations and we must consider how the specificity of entanglements is integral to creating boundaries and meanings. Barad asserts the specificity of the configurations arguing that “space, time and matter do not exist prior to the intra-actions that reconstitute entanglements” (2007, p. 74). By highlighting the dynamic, shifting and evolving nature of configurations of entanglements, Barad suggests that meanings that are attached to “things” cannot be separated from the dynamic material-discursive entanglements that create these meanings. According to Barad, intra-activity is more than just an important concept to discuss, it is how the universe works.

Unpacking the concept of agential cuts helps to clarify the implications of entanglements on shaping phenomena. Barad (2007) describes agential cuts in relation to apparatuses.

Apparatuses are material-discursive practices that create specific material-discursive reconfigurations, which in turn produce objects and subjects. Using an example from science, Barad compares an apparatus to a measurement tool and explains that tools have implications for operationalizing constructs, ultimately shaping their measurement. In other words, the tools that are used to measure make assumptions about what the construct is, shaping what counts and what is measured. Similarly, agential cuts act on apparatuses to “produce determinate boundaries and properties of ‘entities’ within phenomenon” (Barad, 2007, p. 148). As Barad proposes, categories of humans and non-humans, nature and culture, material and discursive are made temporarily distinct through agential cuts. Thus, although agential cuts are necessary for theorizing and describing phenomena, we must be cautious about how these cuts can simplify the dynamic entanglements of the material-discursive world that co-constitute meanings and boundaries.

Barad’s approach to posthumanism is a performative one that considers how knowing, being and thinking are engagements from within. Barad states that “theorizing and experimenting are not about intervening (from outside) but about intra-acting from within, and as part of, the phenomenon produced” (2007, p. 57). Barad problematizes the separation of ontology and epistemology, arguing that such separation “assumes an inherent difference between human and nonhuman, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse” (2007, p. 185). According to Barad, knowing and being are intra-actively co-produced, inseparable phenomena. Thus, knowing and being cannot be understood from a distance, as they emerge from within, and as a result of dynamic intra-actions and material discursive practices. Barad’s performative approach considers how both humans and non-humans engage in performative acts that shape boundaries and meanings created within entanglements. By highlighting how

engagements with material-discursive practices shape knowing, being and onto-epistemology (i.e. thinking), Barad challenges representationalism that asserts that there are representations and things to be represented. Meanings and experiences are not universal or fixed, rather they are shaped by dynamic, shifting entanglements of discourses and materialities. Thus, bodies and materialities are not just in the world, but are central to the dynamic organization of what is and what comes to matter.

Barad's approach also offers a compelling framework for rethinking agency and subjectivity. Within this framework, agency is not confined to the human subject and is not a trait, characteristic or something that can be "given" to individuals or things. Barad argues that matter is active because it is "produced and productive, generated and generative" (2007, p. 137). Agency emerges through the world's ongoing, dynamic intra-actions; agency is what happens when matter intra-acts through entanglements (Barad, 2007). Thus, Barad argues that agency is a result of the world's ongoing material-discursive reconfigurations which produce constant difference. The material-discursive components of the entanglements come together to produce agencies that shape the possibilities and boundaries of a specific entanglement (Barad, 2007). In this way, different configurations of materialities and discourses shift the possibilities for meanings and boundaries. If agency is the natural result of entanglements between material-discursive contexts, humans' actions cannot be thought of as purely the result of individual intention because they are intimately shaped by the intra-activity of material-discursive entanglements. Barad asserts that "... it is less that there is an assemblage of agents than there is an entangled state of agencies" (2007, p. 23). Barad coins this approach to agency "post-human performativity," which considers how materials, discourses, spaces and time are co-constituents of subjectivities, meanings and boundaries. Thus, individual subjectivities are not formed outside

of these dynamic entanglements and cannot be understood within this framework without acknowledging the co-constituting agencies produced within entanglements and their effects.

Subjectivity is a concept that I explore throughout this thesis. Subjectivity has been conceptualized through humanist frameworks as one's sense of self that is conscious, stable, coherent and ahistorical (St Pierre, 2000). Humanist subjectivities are understood as "uncontaminated by the outside," making the "core" of one's subjectivity unaffected by social practice and social change (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 500). Through a poststructural framework, subjectivity is still about an individual's sense of self, but it is considered fluid, contextual, political and discursively produced (Brock, Martin, Raby & Thomas, 2019). St. Pierre (2000) explains that a poststructural approach to subjectivity considers how in taking up and embodying discourses, individuals can also resist and reframe discourses in the continuous reworking of their subjectivities. Further, poststructural subjectivity focuses on how people come to know, live, embody and make meaning of their identities, as well as how this sense of self influences the ways that they perceive the world. Moving beyond a poststructural approach to subjectivity focused on discourse, posthuman subjectivity is produced, re-configured and embodied in specific material-discursive contexts (Callus & Herbrechter, 2012). Like poststructural subjectivity, posthuman subjectivity is not cohesive, meaning that the way it materializes is messy and contextual. A Baradian approach positions subjectivities as "emergent within specific material-discursive apparatuses" (Juelskjaer, 2013, p. 764). Juelskjaer explains that entanglements of space-time-matter "simultaneously come to matter in specific ways that affect specific bodies and qualities of subjectivities" (2013, p. 762). Similarly, Taylor (2013) repositions subjectivities through a posthuman framework as "transformed and continually re-made through the concerted co-constitutive acts of objects-bodies-spaces" (p. 690).

Like Pomerantz and Raby (2018), I understand girls' and young women's subjectivities to be continuously, dynamically and intra-actively co-created by entangled materialities and discourses. In this thesis, I discuss gendered activist subjectivities within entanglements of materialities and discourses, highlighting the ways that the meanings and boundaries around activists and activism are messy and contextual.¹ I also recognize that gendered activist subjectivities are differentially embodied and experienced by the young women in my sample. I argue that a posthuman approach to subjectivity that works to temporarily isolate subjectivity within entanglements of space, time, matter, discourse, allows us to better understand the various agencies, forces, materials, narratives and histories that come to matter in perceptions of and experiences of the world.

Barad's theorizing has been applied in various research contexts including, for example, girls' school-based activism (Renold, 2018), gendered power in the classroom (Taylor, 2013), children's heterosexual play (Huuki & Renold, 2016), smart girlhood (Pomerantz & Raby, 2018), girls' ill/well-being in schools (Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013), queer bathroom graffiti (Shabbar, 2016) and maker culture and DIY technologies (Snake-Beings, 2018). Rosiek (2019) has also used Barad's framework alongside critical race theory to explore the impacts of racial resegregation in public schools (Rosiek, 2019). Rosiek (2019) explains that using posthumanism alongside critical race theory allows them to explore race and racism as psychological and social mechanisms, as well as recognizing how racism "is a shape-shifting material-semiotic agent

¹ In this thesis, I focus on intersectional gendered activist subjectivities rather than identities. Analyses centered on subjectivities are better suited to a posthuman project because they work to decenter humans as solely agentic, by illustrating the ways that specific, open, material-discursive contexts co-constitute individuals' perceptions of and experiences of the world. This framing of subjectivity aligns with the goals of a posthuman approach by blurring the boundaries between human and non-human, as well as culture and nature.

circulating around and through us and we are at times its objects” (p. 84). The author argues that very little work has explored the potential of an analysis that combines posthumanism and critical race theory, and there are still implications of this multi-theoretical framework to be examined (Roziak, 2019). Though I do not engage a multi-theoretical approach in this project, I do aim to engage in an intersectional, posthuman analysis.

Barad’s intra-active approach is compatible with an intersectional analysis that considers how gender, race, class, sexualities and abilities shape and are shaped by material-discursive contexts. Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1994) created the concept of intersectionality to examine the ways that women of colour differentially experience sexism and gender-based violence because of their intersecting identities and marginalization as women and people of colour. An intersectional analysis centers on the ways that intersecting contexts, including gender, race, age, class, sexualities and abilities are connected to systems of power and marginalization, and their effects on lived experiences. Most importantly, an intersectional analysis emphasizes that social forces such as gender, race, age, class, sexualities and abilities are complex, shifting and experienced in multiple ways. By highlighting the dynamic, shifting nature of entanglements, Barad’s framework allows us to think about how bodies, objects and spaces are shaped by entangled social factors, and how the meanings and boundaries produced intra-actively reflect or resist social inequalities. For example, Pomerantz and Raby (2018) explain that the materiality of a hoodie with a school logo, and the meanings imbued to the hoodie by girls at one school, are enmeshed with discourses of class, gender, status, school pride and smart girlhood. In this way, the entanglement of the girls’ bodies, the hoodie and the school environment “is not just a discursively produced system of signs with symbolic power – it is the relational mechanism by which meanings materialize, take shape, and matter in certain girls’

lives” (Pomerantz & Raby, 2018, p. 13). By engaging in an intersectional, posthuman analysis of young women’s social justice blogging, I will consider how various shifting and differentially experienced social factors, including gender, class, race and ability co-constitute the meanings and boundaries intra-actively produced in material-discursive contexts. While I make an agential cut to center on the dynamic nature of girls’ and young women’s intersectional and gendered online activist subjectivities in this thesis, I also consider how making agential cuts comes with an ethical responsibility to acknowledge what gets left out of the analysis.

Barad’s posthuman approach has been applauded for making two key contributions to posthuman theories (Fox & Alldred, 2017). First, Fox and Alldred (2017) explain that Barad’s use of quantum physics in her theorizing (re)position the researcher as part of the research intra-activity, co-producing data and its interpretations. Second, they note that Barad’s onto-epistemological framework offers a radical rethinking of the boundaries of the natural and cultural worlds, arguing they are enmeshed, entangled and intra-active (Fox & Alldred, 2017). However, like the various posthuman approaches mentioned earlier, Barad’s framework has been critiqued. For instance, critical engagement has come from science and technology scholars (e.g. Hollin, Forsyth, Giraud, & Potts, 2017), poststructuralist scholars (e.g. Bruining, 2016), Marxist scholars (e.g. Rekret, 2018), feminist scholars and postcolonial scholars (e.g. Ahmed, 2008; Braunmühl, 2018; Willey, 2016). Hollin and colleagues (2017) are critical of Barad’s narrow representation of previous work on reflexivity in science and technology studies. They also question whether it is appropriate to apply micro theories of quantum physics to macro concepts and phenomenon (Hollin et al., 2017). Braunmühl (2018) offers a feminist critique of Barad’s concept of agential realism. The author argues that in Barad’s theorizing of agency as belonging not only to human subject, but also to objects, she reproduces heteronormative, patriarchal

narratives that vilify passivity. The author states that “Barad’s devaluation of passivity accords with hegemonic, male-supremacist discourse, which femini[z]es that attribute” (Braunmühl, 2018, p. 231). Braunmühl (2018) suggests that the binaries of object/subject and active/passive need to be scrutinized with more nuance, indeed considering how passivity can be attributed to humans too, especially those who are marginalized. Using a Marxist approach, Rekret (2018) argues that Barad's thinking falls short of truly challenging dualism, because she does not acknowledge how the conditions for many dualisms are rooted in capitalist structures.

Although I acknowledge the various critiques of Barad’s framework, like others (e.g. Hollin et al., 2017; Meissner, 2016; Selberg & Hinton, 2016), I see her ethical framework as integral to an intersectional, posthuman analysis, which can work to counter some of the aforementioned critiques. Barad asserts the need to rethink ethics and the ethical subject, arguing that the ethical subject is not a distant, rational subject, rather an embodied, embedded and intra-active approach to the world. Through this rethinking of ethics and the ethical subject, Barad argues that “ethical relations extend to the other-than-human” (2007, p. 392). Thus, it is not just that ‘we’ (i.e. humans and non-humans) are implicated in ethical relations, and must consider the effects of these relations, but rather a posthuman approach to ethics that recognizes that ‘we’ are intimately involved in the world and in the intra-activity that shapes what comes to matter (Barad, 2007). Hollin and colleagues (2017) acknowledge the value of Barad’s ethical framework, arguing that most research that applies a Baradian framework tends to overemphasize the role of entanglements, overlooking the substantial political and ethical contribution of her work. They suggest engaging in agential cuts comes with ethical responsibilities, wherein “...though matter itself has stability, it is still necessary to be accountable for the cuts that created this stability and to grapple not just with the ethical

consequences of these cuts, but with the constitutive exclusions that underpin them" (Hollin et al., 2017, pp. 933-934). I find Barad's ethical agenda to be one of the most captivating parts of her posthuman framework. While I adopt Barad's framework to examine the intra-active, entangled nature of young women's social justice blogging, I also consider the importance of posthuman ethics in my analyses.

Barad's approach to posthumanism is well-suited to address my research questions, as my questions evoke an analysis that considers how various intra-actions between technology, online spaces and materialities, as well as discourses of girlhood and youth, shape the meanings and experiences of online activism. This approach will allow me to think critically about how the technology that the young women use—the artifact of the blog, the online communities that are forged in blogging spaces, and discourses of girlhood, activism and youth—shape the meanings and experiences of their activism, without privileging one phenomenon over another. Further, this theoretical perspective will help me to challenge discourses of 'slacktivism' and 'clicktivism' by highlighting how the meanings and experiences of the young women's activist blogging cannot be understood outside of the entanglements within which they exist, thus problematizing the online and offline binary, and challenging a homogenizing conceptualization of online activism. In addition, this theory will allow me to think about definitions of activism more broadly, by considering how activism can be understood in relation to materialities (e.g. technology, online spaces) and discourses of girlhood and youth. I aim to use this theory to highlight the need for a dynamic theorization of youth's blogs, online activism and online intersectional gendered activist subjectivities.

Informed by Barad, in this research, I center on blogs co-created by young women aged 15-24 to examine the complexity of mobilizing an online, gendered, youth activist subjectivity.

Blogs can be understood as websites where blog writers share their thinking about something. Blogs are frequently updated and changing, personal in nature and include various socially embedded links that guide readers towards other websites and blogs (Keller, 2016). For instance, a blog might include a blogroll list, which provides various hyperlinks to other blogs that have similar themes and address related issues. Further, blogs often have commenting features for readers to share their thoughts and foster a sense of community. Rather than seeing blogs, blogging communities and activist blogging as bound, fixed or stable, I aim to emphasize the intra-activity of activist blogging. By highlighting the entangled, shifting and dynamic material-discursive contexts that co-constitute young women's activist blogging I urge a rethinking of the relation between materiality and activist blogging or as Barad (2007) would say—how matter comes to matter—in the meanings, boundaries and experiences of young women's activist blogging. More specifically, this qualitative research project explores two research questions. First, I ask: what material-discursive contexts generate the possibilities for young women to engage in online social justice activism? Second, I ask: how do dynamic, shifting material-discursive entanglements around girlhood, youth and activism shape meanings of activism and activist subjectivities? Overall, the goal of this project is to understand young women's online, social justice activism within complex entanglements of body-objects-space-time, ultimately challenging the construction of their work as uncritical, simplistic or a slack form of activism.

Disentangling Key Terms

While the aim of this project is to offer a posthuman analysis focused on the intra-activity of young women's activist blogging, I think it is important to offer some contextualization around key terms that I use throughout this thesis. For clarity and brevity, I have “defined” these terms separately and by doing so have positioned them as ontologically separate, conflicting with

Barad's approach that works to recognize the ways that meanings and boundaries do not exist prior to the intra-actions that co-constitute them. While "defining" terms as bound, distinguishable concepts with pre-existing or fixed meanings is at odds with a posthuman project, I enact an agential cut to disentangle these concepts and phenomena from the intra-activity of young women's activist blogging. Most scholarship that has worked to "define" these terms has focused on a poststructural perspective. In this section, I draw on this poststructural research to temporarily disentangle these terms, however my analysis will illustrate how through a posthuman framework, the boundaries and meanings of these concepts are intra-actively produced, shifting, dynamic, embodied, entangled and co-produced in the specific material-discursive contexts of young women's activist blogging. In what follows, I disentangle youth, activism and art.

Youth

The United Nations defines youth as a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood for individuals between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2008). In this way, "youth" can be used as a bridging term, between older teenagers and younger/emerging adults. Beyond a developmental stage focused on age, like others, I see youth as a social construction, and recognize how it is shaped by shifting social and cultural norms and discourses, for example, ones that problematically frame youth as risk-takers, rebellious, in a state of becoming, apathetic and social problems (Jenks, 2009; Raby, 2002). In line with my posthuman approach, I see bodies, spaces and materialities as co-constituting configurations of youth. Many scholars work to challenge such problematic framings of youth. For example Molina-Girón (2018) asserts that youth are "active, opinionated, and invested citizens whose agency is central to shaping the

future of their societies” (p. 379). This thesis similarly embraces approaches that understand youth as social participants. I use the terms youth and young people interchangeably in this research.

Activism

Although there is a growing body of literature on activism and youth’s social justice activism, there is ambiguity around what activism is or looks like. It is crucial to note that there are many forms of activism with varying goals and beliefs. In Taft’s (2011) seminal book on self-identified teenage girl activists, she notes that “central to their understandings is the claim that activism, first and foremost, is about a desire to create change, to make the world into a different and better place” (p. 26). In this way, activism can occur through direct involvement in the political system (e.g. lobbying a government, forming an alternative political party) or without direct involvement in the formal political system (e.g. school walkout). Many girls in Taft’s project emphasize social justice in their reflections on activism and activist identities. I resonate with Ana’s definition of activists, a self-identified teenage girl activist in Taft’s project, who asserts that an activist is “someone who sees what is really happening and who has a critical vision about this... an activist is someone who can do many things... and who doesn’t just have the capacity (because everyone has the capacity), but who also has the desire, who wants to change what they see” (Taft, 2011, p. 26). Although there are debates in the literature about the validity of certain forms of activism, especially activism that occurs online (e.g. Cabrera et al., 2017), and whether activism is necessarily political, I see all activism aimed at social justice as political as it combines critical thought with a willingness to challenge and critique the status quo, which is paramount to inspiring social action.

Art

Art is also an important term in this research , as I position young women’s activist blogs as archives or collections of (digital) art. Providing a rigorous review of various definitions of art is beyond the scope of this study, however I use the term “art” to identify various forms of cultural and material productions including photography, prose, poetry, film. Such forms of art can be created using technology and shared in online spaces. I recognize that “art” is embedded in relations of power and hierarchies when it is assessed for beauty and worth. However, in this thesis, I suggest that art’s value is not in its beauty or the creator’s talents, instead the ways that art and art-making are aesthetic texts and experiences (e.g. Dyer, 2019; Georgis, 2006) where narratives, lived experiences and uncertainties “find expression in art” (Dyer, 2019, p. 16). Dyer (2019) explains that “art can operate as a countersite to sanctioned national histories and gendered embodiments, and release unassimilated conflicts not previously represented or sufficiently expressed” (pp. 9-10). Therefore, the collections of art that comprise young women’s activist blogs offer insight into their lived experiences, uncertainties and visions of more socially just world.

The aim of this introduction chapter was to discuss the inspiration behind this project and the theoretical approach that has guided my thinking at all stages of this thesis. In the second chapter, I provide an overview of the relevant literature on youth’s online activism, girlhood and activism, and arts-based approaches to activism. In chapter three, I outline my methodological approach, explain my data collection and analysis processes, and reflect on my role as a researcher in shaping the findings of my project. In chapter four, I outline the findings of my project through a posthuman lens, and situate my findings within the literature. My discussion in chapter four is organized into four key themes: the blogging process; the embodiment of neoliberal activist (influencer) subjectivities; the mobilization of activism; and intersectionality

and activist blogging. I conclude my thesis with a discussion of the implications of this project, the strengths and weaknesses of my project and future directions for research about young women's activist blogging. Overall, I argue that my project adds to and deepens the discussion of young women's online social justice activism, by highlighting the value of analyses centered on the entangled, dynamic and intra-active material-discursive contexts that make differences in young women's experiences and meanings of activist blogging.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter, I discuss several bodies of literature that are necessary for contextualizing my project. It is important to note that the literature I review here is predominately poststructural scholarship, which privileges discourses and a framing of identity and subjectivity that differ from the posthuman approach that I adopt. I begin by discussing youth's online activism, including how discourses of activism shape the perceptions of youth's online work, and the potentials and pitfalls of online activism. Next, I explore arts-based approaches to activism, specifically, debates around what characterizes socially-engaged, political and activist art and how discourses of activism shape the perceived effectiveness of arts-based approaches to activism. This section of my literature review will complicate a singular conceptualization of activism and highlight how girls' and young women's blogging might serve as an aesthetic expression and/or an art-making practice. I will also complicate a singular conceptualization of girlhood and discuss the implications of hailing the categories of "girls" and "young women." I conclude with a discussion of girlhood and activism, including how discourses of girlhood, youth, and growing up, as well as neoliberal girl power discourses shape girls' and young women's experiences of activism and the development of activist subjectivities.

Youth's Online Activism

I begin my literature review with a discussion of youth's online activism. I will describe how I am understanding online activism and how youth are engaged in it. I will highlight the problematic binary of online/offline activism and articulate a need to conceptualize activism beyond a binary approach that legitimizes some forms of activism over others. I conclude my discussion by outlining some of the benefits of engaging in activism online for youth, as well as some of the concerns that exist in popular discourses around the fears of such engagement.

Young people have turned to social media, including discussion forums, blogs and networking sites, to mobilize their activism and activist identities (Fullam, 2017; Garcia & Vemuri, 2017; Harris & Roose, 2014; Jackson, 2018; Keller, 2012; Mendes, Ringrose & Keller, 2018). Youth's online activism varies in its form and content. For example, some youth create social-change-oriented YouTube videos (Caron et al., 2018; Garcia & Vemuri, 2017; Raby et al., 2018), while others create specific blogs and discussion forums (Jackson, 2018; Keller, 2012). Despite the varied methods that youth use to engage in online activism, researchers assert the need to acknowledge the complexity of the strategies that youth use to engage in activism online (Caron et al., 2018; Raby et al., 2018). For example, on YouTube, youth employ various cinematic strategies, editing techniques and changes in gesture and voice to share their message, and attempt to avoid negative assessment from viewers (Caron et al., 2018).

Youth's activism, broadly speaking, is popularly discussed through a binary of online/offline with the perception that each type of activism offers different opportunities and challenges for creating change (Cabrera et al., 2017; Fullam, 2017), although frequently, this binary approach constructs online activism as less useful overall. For example, Fullam (2017) argues that because online activism in and of itself will not inspire individuals to engage in activist behaviour in the offline sphere it is unlikely that online activism will create 'real' change. For Fullam (2017), peer, parental and environmental characteristics in the offline world lead to the development of a political identity, and social media should be conceptualized as a tool that is best used to transmit information about offline activism. Thus, this conceptualization of online activism would categorize youth's online work as incomplete. Some youth also hold similar beliefs about online activism, suggesting that online activism, such as engagement in political or activist groups on Facebook, should be better understood as an "internet phenomenon" rather

than a legitimate form of political engagement (e.g. Ekström & Sveningsson, 2019; Vromen, Xenos & Loader, 2015).

In contrast, other researchers problematize the binary approach to defining activism (Guillard, 2016; Tupper, 2014; Mendes et al., 2018). For example, Tupper (2014) draws on the success of the Idle No More movement to challenge this binary approach to activism. The author argues that social media and technology were paramount in attracting international attention and support, youth's participation, and the organization of events in communities. Tupper advocates for the need to conceptualize activism beyond the online/offline binary, and that youth's engagement more accurately reflects a hybrid form of activism that combines elements of online and offline participation (see also Milošević-Dordević, & Žeželj, 2017). Similarly, while reflecting on the use of Tumblr in an introductory Women's and Genders Studies class, Guillard (2016) asks: "If students associate Tumblr with learning or deepening their knowledge of feminist theories and activism, how could that virtual world be viewed as separate from their day-to-day realities and the people that fill those environments?" (p. 618).

Debates surrounding the value and effectiveness of online activism are also couched in the binary of activism/slacktivism. This binary approach to characterizing activism tends to distinguish 'real,' 'meaningful' activism, from slack forms of activism that are constructed as less useful and meaningful overall. For example, Cabrera and colleagues (2017) offer ten premises that can be used to distinguish activism from slacktivism in the digital age. The researchers problematize the tendency to generalize and vilify all online engagement as slacktivism and argue for a distinction between individuals who engage in online activism and those who support activist strategies. For example, they suggest that the critical debates and organizing that occur in spaces like Black Twitter better reflect activism, in contrast to "liking" a

Facebook page which they see as an example of an activist strategy because it requires little risk. Cabrera and colleagues conclude by asserting that it is troublesome to see “social media [as] inherently ineffective platforms for challenging and transforming oppressive social conditions” (p. 411), rather social media should be viewed as a tool capable of creating a collective of individuals committed to social and political activism. Further, Mendes and colleagues (2018) offer a poignant critique of slacktivist discourses that vilify digital feminist activism, arguing that such approaches discount the mental and emotional labour required to facilitate and participate in such work, and overlook the potential for digital feminist activism to raise feminist consciousness. Following these authors, I do not aim to reduce the entangled nature of young women’s blogging to the online/offline activism binary or the binary of slacktivism/activism, instead I recognize how discourses, spaces, and technologies shape definitions and perceptions of youth’s activism, including their online social justice activism.

The reasons that young people turn to online spaces to engage in activism are multifaceted, although some self-identified youth feminists suggest that there is no space for them to engage in feminist activist work in their homes, schools or communities (Jackson, 2018; Keller, 2012). Youth activists celebrate and embrace the online community as it allows them to meet other youth activists and participate in communities beyond the boundaries of physical geography (Baczewska et al., 2018; Jackson, 2018; Keller, 2012; 2016). For example, in the research by Garcia and Vemuri (2017), Jackson (2018) and Keller (2012; 2016; 2019), some youth explained that online spaces provided them with access to other youth activists and exposure to feminist and activist resources that were not easily accessible in their more conservative school and family environments, thus making the online community paramount to the development of their feminist and activist identities. Youth activists in Kennelly’s (2014)

research emphasized the importance of community and support systems in social movements, arguing that without such supports the emotional labour of activism can quickly lead to burnout and withdraw from activism. Thus, social media might be an essential tool for youth activists to find community and support. Other researchers argue that online spaces provide youth with unique opportunities to mobilize and develop their activism and activist identities without the presence of an “all knowing adult” that exists in adult-governed spaces such as schools (Baczewska, Cachon, Daniel & Selimos, 2018; Horgan, Forde, Martin & Parkes, 2017; Kahne, Hodgins & Eidman-Aadahl, 2016; Llewellyn & Westheimer, 2009). For example, many youth feminists explain that the comment and discussion section on blog pages is paramount to developing an online community, as it allows readers to talk to each other about the posts’ content, connect their own experiences, seek support and make friends (Keller, 2016). However, some youth in Guillard’s (2016) project were also critical of the diversity of conversations around feminism and other social issues on the blogging platform Tumblr, arguing that while there was a breadth of conversations, many of them lacked depth.

Online spaces may also provide youth with ‘safe’ spaces to ‘talk back’ against experiences of discrimination or inequality in ways that they may feel uncomfortable doing offline because of scrutiny from peers, adults, or fear of attracting threatening comments in person (e.g. Harris & Roose, 2014; Keller, 2012). While online spaces provide access to resources and spaces to ‘talk back’ there are also norms around what types of content is appropriate to post in certain spaces (e.g. Keller, 2019). For example, some youth explained that while they felt comfortable posting overtly activist and feminist content in blogging spaces organized around feminism, they were more reserved about posting this type of content on their personal social networking pages (Baczewska et al., 2018; Jackson, 2018; Keller, 2012; 2016;

2019). While pointing to the potential for online spaces to provide opportunities for youth to mobilize online activism, this also raises questions about what makes an online space ‘safe’, a point that I return to later.

In addition to online spaces that are created by and for youth, there are online spaces created by adults for youth (e.g. Pathak-Shelat, 2019; Roque, Dasguta & Costanza-Chock, 2016). For example, Scratch Online Community was created by adults for children and younger youth (aged 8-16) to connect with each other and develop and mobilize projects related to social justice (Roque et al., 2016). However, the site requires approval from the adult moderators before the content is posted, which has the potential to limit the topics discussed, and the narratives that are deemed ‘acceptable’ and ‘appropriate’ to circulate related to approved topics (Roque et al., 2016). In one example of censorship, a youth’s project about animal testing and animal rights was removed from the site after the adult moderators concluded that the topic was “too graphic” and “too harsh” for the aims of the online space and the community (Roque et al., 2016). This example highlights how discourses of childhood and youth shape expectations around what types of activism and social justice causes are ‘appropriate’ for youth to be engaging in, ultimately distinguishing between activist projects for adults and those for youth (see also Keller, 2016). Although there are challenges to engaging in truly intergenerational activist work with young people (e.g. Bent, 2016; Edell, Brown & Montano, 2016; Taft, 2015; Wyness, 2012), we must also acknowledge how these projects might help young people seek guidance and support from adult activists, and expand their activist networks and communities.

Despite the potential for youth to mobilize their political voices online, there are barriers to online participation (Mendes et al., 2019; Raby et al., 2018; Keller, 2016). Online spaces do not exist in a vacuum, and inequalities swirl about in these spaces. For example, intersecting

forms of privilege and oppression, including but not limited to inequalities grounded in class, sexualities, race, abilities, and gender, shape whose voices are heard and mobilized online (Raby et al., 2018). Further, access to technologies is also shaped by these inequalities (Keller, 2016; Pascoe, 2011). Online violence, including sexism, and anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination are real risks of engaging in online activism (Mendes et al., 2019; Kelly, Pomerantz & Currie, 2006; Pascoe, 2011), which Pascoe asserts mirrors violence and discrimination that occurs offline, “with a larger audience but also with more lasting digital footprints” (2011, p. 14). Keller (2016) argues that the potential for online violence is popularly used to validate moral panics around youth’s online engagement that argue for adult surveillance. Indeed, the risks of online participation should not be overlooked, however Keller (2016) contends that protectionist discourses have the potential to place technology as the problem, rather than structural inequalities, such as racism, sexism and homophobia that are perpetuated in both online and offline spaces.

Researchers also interrogate the construction of online communities as ‘safe’ spaces for activism, and for activists to mobilize their work and activist subjectivities (e.g. Clark-Parsons, 2018; Mendes et al., 2019). Although some activists may turn to online spaces to overcome geographical and accessibility barriers to activist communities in their local communities, Clark-Parsons (2018) argues that online spaces should not be viewed as utopic safe spaces because the construction and maintenance of a ‘safe’ space online is always in flux. By examining a private feminist activist page on Facebook, Clark-Parsons suggests that the concept of ‘safe’ space is taken up and employed in contradictory and often problematic ways. For example, the moderators of the page aimed to create a ‘safe’ place for women from sexism and misogyny by having a gatekeeping process, wherein new members must be invited to join the group. Clark-

Parsons is critical of this process, noting that it works to foreground the experiences of white, cis-gendered women. The author concludes by asserting that the concept of ‘safe’ space, and activists’ aims to construct ‘safe’ places online should be replaced with the goal to “...strive for safer spaces, always working from the assumption that no digital space can ever be truly safe for all participants at all times” (Clark-Parsons, 2018, pp. 2141-2142). Thus, while I recognize how online spaces might be attractive and accessible spaces for young people to engage in activist work, I also emphasize the importance of considering how online spaces that attempt to create ‘safe’ inclusive spaces may also exclude and marginalize.

In sum, youth’s online activism, including their online social justice activism, takes many forms and is popularly understood through an offline/online binary, which creates a problematic hierarchy of activism that legitimizes offline participation. Online spaces created by and for youth provide opportunities for peer-to-peer political socialization and possibilities of social change in and of itself, although intersecting social contexts shape whose voices are legitimized online. In this section, I have highlighted how youth’s online activism is conceptualized within the literature primarily from a humanist and poststructural perspective. Taken together, the poststructural scholarship discussed here offers insight into the ways that discourses of youth, activism, as well as materialities such as spaces, technologies and intergenerational activist projects shape the possibilities and perceptions of youth’s online social justice activism. However, there is a clear gap in the literature on youth’s online social justice activism. Specifically, more posthuman research and analysis on youth’s online social justice activism is needed to attend to the ways that intra-active material-discursive contexts shape the possibilities for their work. By engaging in a posthuman analysis of girls’ and young women’s online social justice activism as it is presented on their blogs, I aim to address this gap.

Arts-Based Approaches to Activism

It is also necessary to provide a brief review of the literature around arts-based approaches to activism, or art activism, to better understand how blogs, as archives of digital media art, and the various forms of art, for example, writing, poetry, digitally-created illustrations and graphics embedded within young women's blogs, are used to mobilize activism and activist subjectivities. I will begin by describing what art activism is and how art can be both political and socially engaged. Drawing on the example of the REDress project, I will illustrate the power of art activism for the creator and the viewers. I will conclude this section with a discussion of digital media art and the potential for blogs as collections of online art to also be political, activist and socially engaged.

There are many arts-based approaches to activism, including, sculptures, performance, staged installations, street art, graffiti, poetry, prose, music, photography and film. Such arts-based approaches to activism have a history, which researchers trace back to World War II and the Cold War (Cozen, 2013; Simonti, 2018). Some position these approaches as examples of engaged citizenship, as there are intertwined aesthetic and pedagogical components of art (Bayerbach & Ramalho, 2011). Alongside the aesthetics of art, art can also be used as a way to illustrate or convey one's beliefs, worldviews, and offer the viewer a message. Arts-based approaches to activism can be understood as forms of engaged citizenship because they emerge out of engaging in the social, political, affective and material worlds (Bayerbach & Ramalho, 2011; Johnson & Santos, 2013). Further, art is connected to engaging with the material-discursive world and can include representations of experiences with relationality as well as representations of imagined ideals (Bayerbach & Ramalho, 2011; Dyer, 2019). With Barad, art can offer insight into the messiness and complexity of intra-activity, wherein ideas (e.g.

discourse, art style), bodies, spaces and materials (e.g. art supplies) entangle to co-produce the art-making process and co-constitute the work of art. Arts-based approaches to activism have the potential to evoke feelings and reflections on social and political issues in ways that differ from other forms of activism such as marching in the street (Cozen, 2013; Hawley, 2015). For example, Cozen (2013) argues that the metaphors, positioning and orientation of text and graphics in the Canary Project's Green Patriot Poster campaign on climate change urge the viewer to rethink their place in climate change. In this case, the environmentalism poster as a piece of art is an aesthetic expression, or a means to express and symbolize feelings, confusions, and complicated narratives (Dyer, 2019; Hagman & Press, 2010), around capitalism, globalization and environmental degradation.

A current, well-known example of art activism is the REDress Project. Art is the foundation of the project created by Jaime Black, a female Métis artist from Manitoba (Johnson & Santos, 2013). By hanging red dresses in public spaces, the artist aims to bring attention to murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls in Canada (Johnson & Santos, 2013). Jaime Black explains that the purpose of the public installations in the REDress project is to encourage critical discussions around the colonial, gendered and racialized violence against Indigenous women and girls that exists in Canada, and to use the dresses to aesthetically mark their absence (Johnson & Santos, 2013). This example highlights how arts-based approaches to activism involve engagement with an idea that combines personal motivations and understandings with a critical awareness of social structures and inequalities (Frostig, 2011). Further, the physical presence of the red dresses is a powerful symbol of the magnitude of the issue and cannot be easily ignored by the viewer when it occupies a public space. Barad's concept of posthuman performativity is useful here to acknowledge the entangled agencies in the REDress project. The

dresses are active material objects with material and discursive forces that intra-act with bodies, onlookers and the environment where they hang. When hung in space, the dresses mark continued colonial violence and an absence of Indigenous women and girls that should be alive and wearing them. Through Barad (2007), the entanglements of dress-space-body-discourse in the REDress project contain entangled agencies that generate affect.

There are debates in the art world about what characterizes activist/political art, or socially engaged art (e.g. Hawley, 2015; Johnson & Stamos, 2013; Simoniti, 2018). Unpacking the theoretical debates surrounding definitions and functions of art, activist art and theories of artistic value are beyond the scope of my research (for further discussion, see Benjamin, 1936/2005; Simoniti, 2018), however, it is useful to consider how popular constructions of socially-engaged or activist art might reflect discourses of activism and slacktivism, and/or conflicting ideas around effective activism mentioned earlier. For example, Hawley (2015) argues that although art may encourage discussions about social inequalities and cause the viewer to question the status quo, art activism in and of itself is not enough to inspire critical social change. Instead, Hawley (2015) suggests that art activism needs to work alongside social institutions to create critical social change. Further, both Hawley (2015) and Schuhmann (2014) wonder what the implications are of creating activist art under/within the system of which the artist is critical. Specifically, Hawley (2015) questions the effectiveness of art activism, arguing “that interventions enacted within the boundaries of the current sociopolitical framework preclude the possibility of overhauling the framework itself” (p. 103). Others counter these arguments, suggesting that art can provide marginalized individuals with spaces and resources to speak out, and creating activist art or socially/political engaged art “that begs for a public

discussion of important social issues is a palpable act of social action” (Johnson & Santos, 2013, p. 99).

In addition to debates around what characterizes socially-engaged, activist and/or political art, some art-based approaches to activism are legitimized over others (van der Meulen, 2017). For example, activist art that occurs offline (e.g. public installations, performance) tends to be more easily classified as socially engaged or political forms of art, in contrast to digital forms of art such as blogging and graphic illustrations which tend to be missing from conversations on activist art (van der Meulen, 2015). However, like forms of art that occur offline, van der Meulen (2015) argues that digital media art can also be politically engaged art as it grapples with and bridges social, political and technological worlds. In line with this thinking, my thesis seeks to better understand how girl bloggers understand their blogs, including whether or not they see their blogs as archives or collections of digital media art, and how the blogging practice itself might serve as an aesthetic expression for the girls and young women, by providing opportunities to grapple with and express things that are complicated.

Zines and blogs can be thought of as archives or collections of digital media art and art-making practices, however some of them might be engaging more overtly with various modalities of art. Researchers argue that zines and blogs that engage with social and political issues should be thought of as “critical making practices” as they provide spaces for young people to reflect on their explorations with their social and political worlds, intervene with popular discourse and create spaces for creative political engagement (Reitsamer & Zobl, 2014). When blogs are conceptualized as archives of digital media art and/or a “critical making practice,” it is possible to see the various modalities used in the blogging space (e.g. film, prose, graphic illustrations) as aesthetic expressions, and/or arts-based approaches to activism when the

blog engages with social and political issues. Although I argue that all blogs should be understood as archives of digital media art, some blogs more overtly incorporate various forms of art (e.g. graphic illustrations, poetry, film, photography). However, it is worth considering how even the simplest blog that does not incorporate many graphics or illustrations, may be a truly meaningful way for girls and young women to unpack and reflect on their lived experiences, as well as social and political issues. Like van der Meulen (2015), I argue that such examples of digital media art deserve recognition as socially and politically engaged art, and as arts-based approaches to activism. Further, by broadening understandings of activism, it is possible to see arts-based approaches as legitimate forms of noninstitutionalized political participation.

Girlhood and Activism

The final theme of my literature review considers the unique experiences of diverse girls' and young women's activism in both offline and online spaces. I will begin with a discussion of discourses of popular girlhood and how they shape ideas around ideal girlhood. Next, I will unpack how postfeminist, neoliberal narratives of girl power, empowerment and exceptionalism shape girls' and young women's activist identities and activism. Examples of girls' experiences of activism, including girls' blogs will be discussed to highlight how discourses of girlhood and activism shape meanings and experiences of activism. I will conclude this section with a brief discussion of intergenerational activism projects, and the practical and ethical challenges of engaging in truly intergenerational activist work, in an attempt to highlight the unique potential of young women's blogging communities and peer-based activist communities.

Discourses of popular girlhood and hegemonic femininity are shaped by various social contexts such as race, class, sexuality and ability (Harris, 2004; Hill, 2017; Pomerantz & Raby,

2017; Willis, 2009). These discourses saturate teenage culture, producing norms and expectations around the ‘ideal’ girl and girlhood experience (Willis, 2009). Researchers have highlighted how girls reflect on, embody and navigate these discourses as they create and recreate their subjectivities (e.g. Hill, 2009; Taft, 2011; Willis, 2009). Although some researchers frame girls as unconsciously shaped by dominant discourses, teen girl activists in Jiménez’s (2016) and Keller’s (2016) research critique this framing of girls and offer critical insight into the role that intersecting social factors and problematic narratives play in shaping their experiences as teenage activists.

Researchers argue that the category ‘girl’ and discourses of girlhood are expanding to include the experiences of youth and women into their thirties who are often referred to as girls (Harris, 2004; Hill, 2017). Thus, while I focus on the activist blogging of girls and young women aged 16-24, it is necessary to consider how discourses and materialities of girlhood more broadly shape these practices. In contrast to seeing girlhood as a fixed or natural state, I understand girlhood as shaped by various factors, including social forces of privilege and marginalization embedded in race, sexualities, gender, age, class, ability and place. It is necessary to consider who is included in the categories of “girl,” “young women” and “girlhood.” Gonick emphasizes that most often when the category of “girls” is employed, “it is white, middle class, and heterosexual girls whose experiences are referenced” (2006, p. 377). Gonick (2006) urges a rethinking of the intersecting discourses, cultural and social practices that constitute the meanings and boundaries of “girl.” In my study, I do not aim to suggest that girlhood is experienced or understood in a universal way. Instead, I aim to highlight the entangled, dynamic nature of girls’ and young women’s gendered activist subjectivities, recognizing how they are inseparable from material-discursive contexts which co-constitute their meanings. Further, by

complicating the idea of a fixed or natural girlhood I am able to consider how some of the bloggers in my project might experience and navigate tensions of gendered expectations, or separate themselves from discourses of popular girlhood as they mobilize their social justice activism and activist subjectivities, a point I return to later (see for example Taft, 2017).

The potency of postfeminist neoliberal rhetoric focused on the potential for girls to succeed, self-improve and ‘change the world’ controversially positions girls as unfettered by sexism and gender inequality (Harris, 2004; Hill, 2017; Keller, 2016, Pomerantz & Raby, 2017; Taft, 2011). Postfeminism problematically denies the realities of gender inequality, arguing that feminism is no longer needed (see Pomerantz & Raby, 2017). Postfeminist, girl power narratives have implications for girls’ and young women’s activism and activist identities, specifically their role in creating an ideal neoliberal activist identity (Harris, 2004; Herrero-Diz & Ramos-Serrano, 2018; Horton, 2018; Keller, 2016). For example, postfeminist girl power has constructed an activist identity as a commodity that can be bought through graphic t-shirts with empowering taglines, reducing the complexity of navigating a gendered activist identity by suggesting that any girl with the appropriate resources and guidance can become a successful activist (Edell, Brown & Montano, 2016). In addition, postfeminist girl power narratives encourage an individualized approach to activism, for example consumer-based activism such as ethical consumption (e.g. Horton, 2018), which tends to be less focused on broader scale social change. Researchers also showcase how neoliberal girl power narratives shape girls’ blogging, specifically the focus on self-empowerment in many blog posts, and bloggers encouraging readers to mobilize their activism through ethical consumption (Dejmanee, 2018; Horton, 2018; Kanai, 2017; Keller, 2016). In addition, bloggers tend to adhere to the ‘do it yourself’ ethos perpetuated in a neoliberal system that is focused on individual success and developing an

individual activist identity by promoting their blogs on various social media platforms, and by writing sponsored blog posts (e.g. Hill, 2017; Dejmanee, 2018; Keller, 2018; Kim & Ringrose, 2018).

Jessica Taft (2011) problematizes postfeminist girl power rhetoric, arguing that it solicits a reductionist approach to understanding girls' activism that overlooks the experiences that girls and young women have negotiating tensions between popular femininity and an activist identity. There are many diverse and contradictory ideas around girlhood that girls must currently navigate, which take on particular forms for girl activists. For example, some teen girl activists explain that while they want to dissociate from the passive, fragile femininity validated in popular girlhood, they recognize that adhering to some (hetero)sexist norms helps them remain attached to popular girlhood culture (Taft, 2017). Similarly, in Keller's (2016) project, some teenage girl bloggers explain how they manage the tensions between negative stereotypes of feminists and feminism and popular teenage culture. For example, Liz notes "...my Miley Cyrus CD-buying, perezhilton.com-reading, shaved-legs self-breaks a lot of feminist stereotypes. I am also aware that my yelling-at-people-across-tables, giver-of-scary-looks-after-offensive comments, opinionated self keeps some of these stereotypes up, but what can I do?" (Keller, 2016, p. 31). This example illustrates the complexity of navigating dominant gendered expectations and assumptions around a feminist activist identity, which tend to be overlooked by both a reductionist girl power approach and more traditional assumptions about femininity. Specifically, neoliberal girl power narratives that consider an activist identity as one that is easily achieved through consumer culture overlook the nuances of navigating a gendered activist subjectivity. Herrero-Diz and Ramos-Serrano (2018) question the role that postfeminist girl power narratives have for girls' online participation. They suggest that these narratives have led

to the construction of an idealized girl who is concerned about others, and is empowered to use technology to “do someone for the greater good” (Herrero-Diz & Ramos-Serrano, 2018, p. 110). While this framing might work to normalize activism in discourses of popular girlhood, it also has the potential to place pressure on girls to be protagonists at the forefront of social change.

Girls’ and young women’s activism and activist subjectivities are also shaped by intersecting narratives of growing up and girlhood (e.g. Taft, 2017; Keller, 2016). For example, popular conceptualizations of youth as apolitical result in the construction of youth activists as ‘exceptional’ or ‘spectacular,’ thus distinguishable from ordinary youth (Gordon & Taft, 2011; Raby & Raddon, 2015). Narratives of exceptionalism shape the ways that teens think about activism, their political identities (Keller, 2016; Taft, 2017) and their willingness to self-identify as an activist (e.g. Taft, 2017). Taft (2017) illustrates how narratives of exceptionalism might be increasingly relevant for girls, highlighting how the process of becoming and self-identifying as an activist is gendered. For example, some teen girls in Taft’s project were reluctant to self-identify as an activist despite their intense involvement in protest, demonstrations and lobbying in their communities. Many girls emphasized that the focus was on a continuous process of becoming an activist, rather than being one (Taft, 2017). Taft (2017) links this to (hetero)sexist norms that validate a polite, humble girlhood as the girls were less confident asserting an activist identity. These narratives of becoming and discourses of exceptionalism were also echoed by the teenage girl bloggers in Keller’s (2016) project.

In addition to being shaped by various discourses of growing up and gender, girls’ and young women’s activism takes many forms, including but not limited to participating in school-based clubs, walkouts and assemblies, creating social-change oriented YouTube videos and developing blogs (e.g. Brown, 2011; Dejmanee, 2018; Garcia & Vemuri, 2016; Jiménez, 2016;

Keller, 2016; Kim & Ringrose, 2018). For example, Renold (2018) describes a school-based research project created with the goal of engaging girls in creative activism (i.e. creating activist art) around experiences of sexism and gendered discrimination in their schools. Renold (2018) uses a posthuman lens to highlight how the girls' arts-based approaches to activism in the project, such as co-creating graffiti artwork of sexist insults, involve entanglements of discourses around gender, power and surveillance and materialities (i.e. art materials, bodies, spaces). Renold's (2018) research offers a radical approach to rethinking girls' activism around sexism and gendered discrimination. Informed by feminist new material and posthuman thinking, Renold's work articulates the ways that "bodies, space, objects, affects and discourse meet and mesh in unpredictable ways" in the production of activist art (2018, p. 38). Distinguishable from the collection of poststructural scholarship on girls' activism, Renold illustrates the ways that materialities and discourses entangle in ways that shape the possibilities for and boundaries of girls' activism. By highlighting the material force of activist art, Renold's research works to acknowledge and legitimize the potential of art in girls' activist projects. Mendes, Ringrose and Keller (2019) also emphasize the importance of considering girls' and women's more general digital feminist activism through affective, material, technological and cultural lenses. Like forms of activism that occur offline, girls' and young women's online activism is also scrutinized by some who argue that it is an 'easy' way to engage. Mendes and colleagues challenge this construction of girls' and young women's digital activism, arguing that while it might be 'easier' because of the accessibility of participating, there is mental and emotional labour involved in participating in digital feminist activism that tends to go unnoticed. Like Mendes and colleagues, I hope to challenge this framing of girls' and young women's activism by offering a rethinking

of the entangled materialities and discourses the co-produce the possibilities, boundaries and meanings of their activism.

Girls' and young women's blogging practices have been at the center of many research projects (e.g. Gabriel, 2016; Hill, 2017; Horton, 2018; Mendes et al., 2019; Kanai, 2017; Keller, 2016; Keller & Ringrose, 2015), in part because blogging is associated with many aspects of a normative girlhood such as journaling and diary writing (Keller, 2016). Ideas of popular girlhood shape girls' blogging style and content, where most girl bloggers focus on lifestyle, beauty and fashion content (e.g. Dejmanee, 2018; Hill, 2017; Horton, 2018). Although these blogs may not be overtly labelled as activist, some of them might engage with social and political issues. For example, in Dejmanee's (2018) project on fashion blogs founded by girls between the ages of 11 and 16, almost all of the blogs in the sample made at least one reference to feminism. Further, in her project on teenage girls' feminist blogging, Keller (2016) highlights how girls use their blogs as a way to connect feminism to components of teenage girl culture such as fashion, pop culture and media. Some teen girl bloggers explained how ideas around youth and girlhood shape others' perceptions of their blogs (Keller, 2016). Specifically, they noted that while it seemed acceptable for girls' blogs to engage with 'soft' topics like animal rights, it was less expected that they had the knowledge and maturity to engage in critical discussions around more controversial topics such as poverty, racism, women's rights and abortion (Keller, 2016). Despite these claims, girls have explained that they were introduced to feminism and activism through blogging, and that blogging provided them with the chance to try out and experiment with a feminist and/or activist identity (Mendes et al., 2019; Kim & Ringrose, 2018; Keller, 2016).

Keller (2016) argues that in many ways, blogging, like journals and diaries, have been associated with a normative and idealized, popular girlhood experience. Thus, while it might not

be ‘cool’ to be an overtly feminist activist in school, it is ‘cool’ to be an established blogger (Keller, 2016). Perhaps, creating an activist blog allows girls to remain attached to a normative girlhood identity while also mobilizing their activist or feminist identity which may put them at the fringes of an ‘ideal’ or popular girlhood. However, girl bloggers also note complex negotiations between making their content both ‘cool’ and appealing to a youth audience while also sharing theoretical insights and their activist beliefs (Sills, Pickens, Beach, Jones, Calder-Pawe, Benton-Grieg, & Gavey, 2016). Although blogs might be useful for girl activists to remain attached to aspects of an ‘ideal’ girlhood, it is important to note that blogging is not equally available to all girls; girls must have the technological skills, resources and leisure time to engage in blogging (Keller, 2016).

Much of the literature of girls’ and young women’s blogging is centered on the experiences of white, middle class, cis-gendered bloggers (Gabriel, 2016; Mendes et al., 2019). However, both Gabriel (2016) and Hill (2017) emphasize the importance of considering how social forces such as race and ability shape blogging practices. By examining the fashion and lifestyle blog of a young woman with a disability, Hill contends that neoliberal narratives of girlhood, including self-empowerment and choice underpin most of the blog’s content, reflecting observations of other blogs (e.g. Keller, 2016). Gabriel (2016) notes that some Black female bloggers based in Britain identify two main reasons for self-disclosing their gendered and racialized identities. Specifically, the bloggers explain that identifying online as a Black British blogger is a way to self-identify within a broader cultural community, and acts as a way to challenge the negative construction of Black women and girls in popular discourse. Both studies highlight the importance of considering how identities and intersecting forms of privilege and marginalization shape blogging experiences. Moreover, Gabriel’s and Hill’s scholarship are

crucial interruptions to the field of girlhood studies which frequently focus on and (re)center the experiences of white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied girls. Scholars have illustrated the pervasiveness of whiteness (e.g. Owens, Callier, Robinson, & Garner, 2017; Sumner, 2019), Westernized narratives and girl power lenses (e.g. de Finney, 2015; Gonick, 2010) and heteronormativity (e.g. Gonick, 2006) in research with and about girls and young women. While my project is centered on the gendered complexities of mobilizing activism online, I aim to illustrate how gendered experiences are complicated by intersections of privilege and marginalization.

So far, my discussion of girlhood and activism has been centered on the independent work that girls are doing, as well as the peer-to-peer activist work that is happening in online and offline spaces. However, there is also a body of literature that focusses on intergenerational activist work (e.g. Edell et al., 2016; Bent, 2016). For example, Bent's (2016) participation in a UN-based girls' activism summit provided her with the chance to learn alongside girls who were selected to be ambassadors for their community. Although intergenerational work can provide girls with the opportunities to participate in events that tend to be predominately adult-centered (e.g. UN conference), Bent (2016) argues that girls' participation in these events can be tokenistic, wherein they are sometimes told what to say during their speeches, are invited because of their look, which is seen as a positive way to mobilize a campaign, and must learn how to 'play the game' (e.g. respond to questions). The girls involved in the UN girls' rights day initiatives explained how they wanted genuine intergenerational work, wherein adults did not tell them how to understand their lived realities, listened to and legitimized their voices, and allowed them autonomy over what they can say (Bent, 2016). The girls were critical of the ways the adults and the institution streamlined, silenced and overlooked their capacity for political

participation. I explain this example because it helps me to think about why girls and young women might choose to mobilize their activism online and whether this might help them to avoid adults taking control, how their blogging is perceived by readers (peers and adults alike), and how some of these complications of surveillance that exist in offline projects might manifest online. I do not aim to frame adult involvement in youth's activism as inherently problematic, but I acknowledge how power relations and limiting perceptions of youth's political voices can complicate intergenerational activist projects, echoing arguments made by others (e.g. Taft, 2015). As discussed earlier, some researchers call for the need to bring adults back into the discussions of youth's participation, highlighting the potential for mentorship (Wyness, 2012), however, Taft (2015) argues that engaging in truly intergenerational activist projects involves strategic and careful negotiations to ensure that adults' voices and power are not being re-centered.

In sum, discourses of girlhood and neoliberal girl power, as well as intersecting discourses around growing up and becoming an activist, shape the experiences of girls' activism and the development of their activist identities. Like Taft (2011), I recognize how adopting language such as 'girl activist' or 'activist girl' can overlook the heterogeneity of girls' experiences with activism, dismiss some of the tensions that girls experience around navigating a gendered activist subjectivity, and fail to account for the experiences of girls who feel like they are in a liminal space between girlhood and womanhood. In this study, like others, I use the language 'girl activist', 'activist girl' and 'girl bloggers,' which I see as appropriate because I include a critical discussion of how material-discursive entanglements shape these meanings, highlighting the deep contexts and complex intersectionality of a gendered youth activist subjectivity (Keller, 2016; Taft, 2011). However, because I am engaging with youth bloggers

aged 16 to 24 in this project, I also use the term ‘young women’ when referring to participants in an attempt to better reflect the liminality of a youth subjectivity, acknowledging how some of the bloggers may feel in limbo between girlhood and womanhood.

In my research, I ask the bloggers questions that probe their understandings and experiences with activism and an intersectional gendered activist and blogger subjectivity. By doing so, I aim to add to the conversations in the literature around conceptualizations of activism and activist subjectivities as they are shaped by intersections of girlhood, growing up, and blogging. Further, by using a posthuman lens, this project showcases how young women’s activist subjectivities are co-constituted through the materiality of their blogging, addressing a gap in the literature around the entangled material-discursive contexts of youth’s online social justice activism. By offering a critical analysis centered on how material-discursive contexts shape boundaries and meanings of activism and activist subjectivities, my project will illuminate the varied meanings and experiences of a youth gendered activist subjectivity. Further, by adopting a multi-method approach and a posthuman framework, I will unpack the complexities, contradictions and tensions that shape youth’s online activism.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

In this chapter, I discuss my methodological approach, the methods I used to collect my data and reflect on the ways that my embeddedness in the research process shapes the findings presented in the following chapter. First, I draw on Barad (2007) to explain diffractive methodology and consider how this approach shapes my research. Following this, I discuss the sample of blogs and bloggers in my project, as well as how I located the blogs, inclusion criteria I created and how I decided which blogs to include in my sample. I also outline my methods of data collection and analysis, including how these align with my posthuman approach. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the ethical considerations and challenges I encountered in this project, including informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality.

Diffractive Methodology

In line with Barad's approach to posthumanism, I employ a diffractive methodology (2007). A diffractive methodology differs from a reflexive methodology because reflection is grounded in the assumption of representationalism, or the belief that there are things to be represented, representations and the knower who makes these representations (Barad, 2007). Instead, a diffractive methodology is concerned with patterns of difference, focused on how knowledge is made within entanglements and how differences in entanglements affect the production of knowledge (Barad, 2007). In this way, the knower is entangled in the knowledge making process. Barad draws on a wave analogy to explain that diffractions emerge from how waves combine, where they differ and how this results in the spreading and bending of waves when they encounter an obstacle (2007). For example, when a wave crashes against a boulder in the ocean the wave spreads and bends into new waves. Barad uses the wave analogy to position diffraction patterns as "patterns of difference that make a difference — to be the fundamental

constituents that make up the world” (2007, p. 72). A diffractive methodology is concerned with how different ideas, research approaches, methods and contexts shape, interfere with and complicate other ideas, just as a boulder in the ocean shapes, spreads and bends the wave pattern (Pomerantz & Raby, 2018). Central to Barad’s diffractive methodology is the understanding that “diffraction is not merely about differences, and certainly not differences in any absolute sense, but about the entangled nature of differences that matter” (2007, p. 381).

A diffractive approach acknowledges that the researcher intra-actively co-produces meanings and boundaries throughout the research process (Pomerantz & Raby, 2018). For example, this approach sees interviews as emergent in the research intra-activity (Pomerantz & Raby, 2018). Adopting a diffractive methodology requires the researcher to consider how the choices they make throughout the research process, including the questions asked and the sampling techniques used, shape intra-activity. In this way, the researcher enacts agential cuts to seemingly temporarily isolate phenomenon, a concept I discussed earlier in my theory section (Barad, 2007; Pomerantz & Raby, 2018). I will reflect more deeply on my role as a researcher in the research intra-activity when I discuss my methods later in this chapter.

Methods

Participants

I adopted a qualitative research approach that combines critical analysis of five blogs co-produced by young women aged 15 to 24, and semi-structured interviews with three of the bloggers. I critically analyzed five blogs that engage with social and political issues as they relate to the lives of the youth bloggers. To be considered for inclusion in this project, the young women’s blogs needed to be at least six months old and still remain relatively active, for

example posting at least once within the last two months at the start of data collection. From a list of blogs created by girls and young women on the blogging platform Tumblr and through Google searches that I compiled, I purposefully selected the blogs to comprise my sample. I located these blogs using the search feature on Tumblr, using the keywords: “activist,” “activism,” “teen activist,” “girl activist,” “youth resistance,” “feminism,” “climate change,” and “environmentalism.” I also found some of the blogs through other blog pages. For example, if I located a really thought-provoking and creative blog post written by someone that identified as a girl activist, I would see who had “re-blogged” the post onto their page as a strategy to find similar or related blogs and bloggers. I used the Google “blog” search function and the same search terms to locate blogs on other platforms. The five blogs in my sample were selected because they engaged most overtly and consistently with discussions of activism. With Barad (2007), each of the aforementioned choices around locating blogs, as well as participant and blog inclusion should be understood as agential cuts. Each agential cut enacted in the recruitment and inclusion phases of this thesis have implications for the data collected and analyzed.

Table 1. Blog sample.

Blog Title	Description of Blog
Faces of Feminism	Intersectional feminism, gender politics, institutional power
Life of a Blind Girl	Disability focused activism, accessibility, inclusion, lifestyle content
The Shine Theory	More general activism around gender, religion, race, culture, democracy
Tolly Dolly Posh Fashion	Fashion, environmentalism, ethical consumption, sustainability, climate change
Acteevism	Fashion & lifestyle, environmentalism, ethical consumption, sustainability, privilege

Blog Analysis

For each blog, I analyzed the first blog post and last blog post at the time of data collection, and three additional blog posts of my choice. I decided to allow some choice around the other three blog posts that I analyzed for each blog because in my undergraduate research a rigid framework for selecting blog posts to be analyzed led me to miss out on engaging with blog posts that were more directly related to discussions of activism, growing up and girlhood. In one instance, I missed out on engaging with a thought-provoking post titled “how to be an activist when you don’t have time to be an activist,” which read like a how-to-guide for readers and engaged directly with discourses of neoliberal girl power. This post also offered insight into the tensions of defining activism and activist which would have added vibrancy to my discussion. By giving myself some room to be selective about some of the blog posts I analyzed, I engaged with the bloggers’ content that related most closely to my research interests including discussions of activism and growing up, and experiences with girlhood and activism. I selected these blog posts based on their titles.

Although blogs can be analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods, there is a clear gap in the literature around providing qualitative frameworks that can be used for blog analysis, especially ones that align with a posthuman framework. Most commonly, quantitative approaches to blog analysis involve counting the presence of words, themes and hyperlinks, examining the number of readers and investigating the blogs’ algorithm (e.g. Kenix, 2009). Existing qualitative approaches to blog analysis tend to align with poststructural and social constructivist approaches, including critical discourse analysis and thematic analysis of blog posts (e.g. Pauwels, 2012). Other researchers engage in what they call “in situ” digital ethnographies wherein they become deeply immersed in a digital space for a duration of time to better understand the media-making practices and the cultural space as it is happening (e.g.

Keller, 2016), rather than adopting an archival approach that may include examining older content and responses to online media.

My theoretical approach required me to be selective in the framework I used to analyze the blogs, as I needed to be certain that I was not privileging the discursive over the material or vice versa. I used the framework developed by Pauwels (2012) and adapted by Krisjanous (2016) to analyze the young women's blogs. Pauwels (2012) created a multimodal framework that can be utilized to "decode" the form and design of websites and their content as expressions of culture. The author outlines a six-step process of website analysis. In order to engage more deeply with the analysis that the framework probes, I developed a guide for analyzing individual blogs posts which I used in the third and fourth steps of the framework. For each blog that I analyzed, I followed the six-step process for analysis which I will describe below, wherein the first two steps focused on the blog globally, the third and fourth steps required an in-depth analysis of specific blog posts, and the final two steps involved considering technological affordances and commercial or corporate interests of the blog more broadly. Although Pauwels (2012) and Krisjanous (2016) do not classify their framework as a posthuman, it is focused on content, form, meaning, discourses and technologies, offering opportunity to employ posthuman thinking to consider how these are entangled to produce boundaries and affect. I employed this structured analysis process to ensure that I was asking the same questions of each blog, allowing me to better attend to the differences between the blogs. I chose this tool because I thought it would best guide my analysis, recognizing that there are many ways that blog analysis could be approached, each of which would enact agential cuts. In line with Barad's approach to posthumanism, this structured process, including the blog post analysis guide that I created,

helped to facilitate an analysis that did not privilege the material over the discursive, or vice versa.

The first step involved in Pauwels' (2012) framework is spontaneously noting the first impressions of and reactions to the website. This step includes noting how the website looks, including the design layout and format, as well as how the website "feels," including the overall tone. Next, the author states that the website should be analyzed for salient features and topics, including noting the featured topics, tabs and categories on the website. This step involves examining what topics the website explores, and noting which topics are missing. The author compares this step to open coding or clustering, wherein the topics of the website can be clustered or categorized based on repeated patterns and emerging themes.

The third step of this framework involves a more in-depth analysis of the content on the website, and the choices made by the writer to convey a message. In this stage, analysis should focus on the text and the images, including colours, font styles and layout, and the relationship between these features. Further, the content of the website must be coded in a more established way to identify the overarching theme or story that the website shares. The author suggests it is also important to engage in a negative analysis to identify what perspectives are missing on the website in general, as well as within specific posts. The fourth stage of analysis involves considering points of view and voice, as well as the implied audience and the purpose of the website. Here, the analysis should consider who the writer is, as well as the intended audience, and how the content and its presentation are influenced by the writers' goals, and the purpose of the website.

The third and fourth steps of this framework were modified by Krisjanous (2016) with the goal of developing the fourth stage to focus on the complexity of discourse and voice. The

author suggests that engaging in a discourse analysis of websites requires a more nuanced look at the view and voice of the writer and the intended audience. Specifically, the author explains that analysis needs to consider the implications of discourse in the content that is presented. It is necessary to consider how website posts, specifically blogs, can engage in reproductions of social and cultural discourse or engage in micro-ruptures or moments of resistance (Krisjanous, 2016). This modification is helpful for my project because it has allowed me to consider the discourses as they exist within the blogging space, how they are reproduced or resisted by the bloggers, and the role that these discursive representations play in the intra-activity of young women's activist blogging. In addition to discourses, in this step I also considered which materialities (e.g. photographs, graphic illustrations, hyperlinks) exist in the blogging space, and how they shape the intra-activity of activist blogging. To complete the analysis that the authors encourage in these stages I developed an analysis guide that I filled in for each individual blog post that I engaged with (see Appendix C).

By creating this blog post analysis guide I ensured that I was asking the same questions of each individual blog post that I examined on each of the blogs. I created this guide to engage richly with individual blog posts in a way that allowed me to fully address the patterns and analysis that Pauwels (2012) and Krisjanous (2016) urge in the third and fourth stages of the framework. Thus, my analysis process in steps three and four required me to complete this guide for each of the five posts that I have examined for all of the blogs in my sample. Following analysis of specific blog posts, the final two stages of the framework involve an analysis of spatial priming strategies (i.e. pop-ups, banners) and a contextual analysis that considers how the website is linked to corporate or commercial interests. These stages of the analysis require considering how the technology is used on the blog (e.g. pop-ups, banners, advertisements) and

whether the blog and the creators' messages may reflect or be influenced by commercial or corporate interests.

By systematically analyzing the blogs through the above steps, I enacted an agential cut (Barad, 2007) to temporarily isolate the entangled, dynamic, shifting nature of young women's activist blogging. Barad (2007) argues that agential cuts pull things apart and together, and this process co-constitutes the emerging meanings and boundaries. Therefore, the agential cuts that I made in my analysis of the blogs, including my analysis, shape the meanings and boundaries around young women's online activism that I discuss in the next chapter. By analyzing the blogs with a systematic framework, I enacted an agential cut that pulled things apart by looking at snapshots of the blogs, and together, by considering how such snapshots might allow me to better understand the intra-activity of young women's activist blogging. Through Barad, the tools I used to analyze the blogs are part of a broader diffraction pattern entangled with numerous agential cuts, as they are "a material practice for making difference, for topologically reconfiguring connections" (2007, p. 381).

Overall, I found this multi-step process useful in my analysis of the blogs as it ensured that I was asking the same questions of each blog and guided me towards a posthuman analysis. However, sometimes I found the blog post analysis guide that I developed to be limiting, as some of my key observations of the blog posts did not always nicely fit within the questions I had in the guide. As a result, I sometimes I made notes in the margins of the blog post analysis guide, for example, about repeated images, colours, fonts and the positioning of the blogger. Although this multi-step process made my analysis process smooth, it took me much longer to work through for each blog than initially anticipated. Sometimes I needed to spread my analysis of a single blog across multiple days, and I wondered if spreading my analysis of a single blog across

multiple days would somehow distance me from the blogs, online communities and my reactions to them. Ultimately, I do not feel as though analyzing the same blog across multiple days distanced me from the blog because the blog post analysis guide I followed ensured I was asking the same questions of the blog each day.

Semi-structured Interviews

Table 2. Interview sample.

Participant	Age	Race & Ethnicity	Place	Class	Sexuality
Tolly	19	White, British	United Kingdom	No response	Straight
Megan	22	White	United States of America	Upper-middle	Straight
Sama	16	Libyan-American, Arab, Muslim	United States of America	Lower-middle class	Straight

Note. The details in this table reflect participants' self-identifications.

In addition to an in-depth analysis of blogs that considers how entanglements of discourses, technologies, and materials, such as text and visuals intra-act to shape meanings and experiences of young women's activist blogging, I engaged in semi-structured interviews with three of the bloggers. I contacted all the bloggers via the email address posted on their blog, or through the message feature on Tumblr. After explaining my project to the bloggers, I invited them to participate in a semi-structured interview (see Appendix A for email script). Three bloggers responded to this invitation and consented to participate. One interview was conducted via Skype and two were conducted through email. I followed a semi-structured interview guide for each interview (see Appendix B), prompting the young women to discuss their personal experiences with blogging, activism, and an online gendered blogger and/or activist subjectivity. The Skype interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. I reformatted the young

women's email interview responses into a more formal transcript, with the participants' responses following each question.

Following a member-checking process, I coded the interviews thematically by hand. First, I recorded descriptive codes (e.g. blogging process) in the margins of the interview transcripts. Next, I recorded thematic codes (e.g. privilege, activist subjectivities) in the margins of the transcripts. Then, I read each interview transcript considering the participants' interview narratives as a whole, focusing on how their narratives engaged with my research questions. In line with a diffractive methodology that focuses on differences that matter (Barad, 2007), in this stage of the coding process I considered what made each participant's narratives different from others, and the implications of these differences for their experiences and meanings of activist blogging. Following this emergent coding process, I compiled a list of the descriptive and thematic codes in the margins of the transcripts and the notes I had made about the interview transcripts as a whole. I noted which of these codes and notes fit together, and which ones clashed. Following this process, I wrote key themes and codes from the blog analysis and interviews on individual pieces of paper, cut them into small pieces, and with my supervisor, moved them around on a desk to talk through and thus create an outline for the themes and subthemes I discuss in my analysis chapter. This process involved me considering which themes and codes fit together, which were distinct, as well as which codes were overarching themes, and which codes fit under each overarching theme as a subtheme. Points of tension within and between codes and themes were also illuminated in this process.

As highlighted by Pomerantz and Raby (2018), a diffractive methodology acknowledges how interviews are intra-actively shaped by the researchers, the research design and the research process. Further, a diffractive methodology requires the researcher to acknowledge that they are

not separate from the words as they appear in the transcript, rather they co-constitute meanings of narratives in the interview and the coding process (Pomerantz & Raby, 2018). While coding the transcripts, my reactions to the interviews, including what stood out to me as important or curious, intra-acted with the words on the transcript to shape the narrative I share in this project about young women's online activism. Thus, I recognize how I am embedded in the intra-activity and meaning making process of this research. My embeddedness in the research intra-activity and the agential cuts I enact (e.g. analysis steps and process, interview questions) unquestionably shape what comes to matter in this project.

In addition to agential cuts that were enacted by me, materialities and the bloggers also made cuts in this thesis that have implications for the account of young women's activist blogging that I offer in the following chapters. For example, in my interview with Megan, the wifi connection cut in and out at one point of the interview, segmenting the audio. As a result, the audio recording of the interview had a few small breaks where Megan's voice was muffled, unclear and missing. While transcribing, I noted these breaks in the recording for Megan to review in the member-checking process. This disruption diffracted my results as it broke the narrative, requiring Megan rely on her memory to fill in the gaps where the recording was fragmented. Megan also enacted an agential cut in the member-checking process. She told me that while reviewing her transcript, she filled in the gaps where the audio cut-out as best as she could, and she also modified some of her comments where she thought of herself as "rambly." The blogs' format also enacted significant agential cuts that diffracted the results in this thesis. For example, the format of the blogs including the layout of the blog posts, the use of categories and headings, as well as how many pages the blog had, influenced my encounters with the blogs.

Specifically, the layout and positioning of blog posts on the blog pages, as well as the use of colour, photographs and blog titles, swayed the blogs and blog posts in my sample.

Ethical Considerations

There were several ethical implications that I had to consider during the planning and execution of my project, such as anonymity and confidentiality, informed consent and member-checking. Participants were provided with a letter of invitation and an informed consent form via email for them to review and they were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research project in general, the risks and benefits of participating and their role as participants. Although one participant was 16, the research ethics board waived the need for parental consent given that the participant was operating in the public sphere as a blogger, arguing that they were equipped to critically evaluate the risks and benefits of participating in research. Participants reviewed, signed and returned the informed consent form electronically before the interviews. I explained my project at the start of each interview, and again asked participants if they had any questions about their participation or rights as a participant.

The multi-method approach that I used complicated participant anonymity, as it provided the potential for the data collected through blog analysis and interviews to be matched. In my research ethics board application, I proposed that I would use the real names of the blogs to discuss my findings from the blog analysis but would use pseudonyms for the interviews in an attempt to decrease the likelihood of the data being matched. During the research ethics board application, the reviewers argued that anonymity of interview data should be negotiated on a case-by-case basis with each participant, given the public nature of their blogs and the fact that many bloggers use their real names on their blogging sites. Given this response from the research ethics board, I negotiated the anonymity of the interviews with each participant, allowing them to

make an informed choice about the use of their real name or a pseudonym. I can confirm this approach as an ethical research practice, given that each blogger had their first, and in two cases, last names on their blog, along with various photographs of themselves. The bloggers were also quite established with a generous following on their blogs and other social media platforms, and dedicated space on their blogs and other social media accounts to promoting and sharing their blog, as well as encouraging readership and subscription on various platforms. My rationale reflects arguments made by other researchers exploring young people's online cultures (e.g. Caron et al., 2017; 2018).

At the end of each interview, I explained the implications of participants choosing to allow their real name to be used in their interview. As outlined in the informed consent form, participants were reminded that their real blog title would be used when discussing the findings from the blog analysis. I gave the participants several days to decide if they wished to have a pseudonym or their real name attached to their interview. All of the participants chose to have their real first names attached to their interviews. However, the names of schools and workplaces were anonymized in the interview transcripts. I also engaged in member-checking to better ensure that participants were comfortable with the interview data that was used in this project. I provided each participant with a copy of their interview transcript to review and modify prior to engaging in analysis of the interview data. Additionally, the bloggers I interviewed were given the opportunity to request a brief report of the findings of my project, and my contact information if they wish to receive information about this project in the future. All data collected were kept confidential, and accessible only to myself and my supervisor, Dr. Rebecca Raby. Data collected was kept safely stored in locked offices, and all electronic files were password protected and encrypted.

As discussed earlier, I find Barad's discussion of ethics to be one of the most fascinating parts of her theoretical framework. For Barad, "ethics is about mattering; about taking account of the entangled materializations which we are a part of, including new configurations, new subjectivities, new possibilities — even the smallest cuts matter" (2007, p. 384). Like Barad, I see ethics as a complex material-discursive practice that includes diffraction patterns, agential cuts and intra-active entanglements that co-constitute boundaries and meanings, as well as reflections on them. Thus, beyond the various ethical implications pertaining to institutional ethics processes I have outlined, it is necessary to consider ethics in a broader, more posthuman way. In the context of this thesis, each agential cut enacted by me (e.g. research questions, theoretical approach, analysis), but also the various technologies (e.g. blogs formats) have implications for the narrative about young women's activism I share. Barad complicates the framing of an ethical subject, arguing that "the ethical subject is not the disembodied rational subject of traditional ethics but rather an embodied sensibility, which responds to its proximal relationship to the other through a mode of wonderment that is antecedent to consciousness" (2007, p. 391). Therefore, an ethical researcher must approach ethics beyond making the "right" decisions in research, but should instead work towards "meet[ing] the universe halfway, to take responsibility for the role that we play in the world's differential becoming" (Barad, 2007, p. 396).

Chapter Four: Analysis and Discussion

In this chapter, I discuss four emerging themes and various subthemes from my analysis of young women's blogs and interviews with three of the bloggers. The four emerging themes are: the blogging process; the embodiment of neoliberal activist (influencer) subjectivities; the mobilization of activism; and intersectionality and activist blogging. In what follows, I draw on Karen Barad's (2007) approach to posthumanism to discuss my findings from my analysis of the blogs and interviews with the bloggers, and situate my findings within the literature I outlined in chapter two.

Theme One: The Blogging Process

During my analysis of the blogs it became clear that the bloggers dedicated a lot of time, thought and work to their blogging. For example, each blog that I analyzed had new content posted around once or twice each month, and almost all these blog posts had forms of digital media art (e.g. photographs, graphic illustrations, collages). The intra-activity of the blogging process was most clear in the young women's narratives during the interviews. As reflected in their comments, there are many components in the intra-activity of activist blogging. For example, the young women spoke about the time they dedicate to their blogging, where and how they blog, as well as how technology and art shape their experiences with and approaches to blogging. In this theme, I aim to illustrate the intra-activity of activist blogging, including the power of materialities, bodies, spaces and time in co-constituting the blogging process. First, I outline the bloggers' reflections on the blogging process and illustrate the multiple components that are part of the blog-making process. Second, I discuss the relevance of time, including how time is part of the intra-activity of activist blogging. I conclude by addressing how the bloggers explained what they do while they blog as well as where they work on their blog.

All the bloggers that I interviewed highlighted the complex and shifting nature of the blogging process. Each of them suggested that how they create new content to post depends on the topic, whether the words or digital art pieces are the focus of the post, and how passionate (or not) they are about the content. When asked what goes into creating a single blog post, Megan explained:

Uhm, a lot (yeah).² So like I have like a huge running list of things, or articles, or topics, or things that I think I could talk about, and I also carry around a notebook with me almost everywhere (right), uhm to write notes just on things that spark ideas.

Megan's comments emphasize the significance of materialities in the blogging process. For example, she noted how she carries her notebook with her everywhere to jot down ideas. Here, the notebook acts as an extension or blueprint of her blog. By carrying her notebook with her everywhere to brainstorm and plan, it is as if her blog and blogging follow her everywhere too. The bloggers frequently alluded to a discourse of "good blogging" that involved consistently posting high-quality content that aligned with the blogs' and bloggers' online brands, a finding I discuss in more detail later in this chapter. In this example, the notebook has "material-discursive power" (Barad, 2007), rather than being a passive object that humans use. Megan's notebook has material power, offering space for notetaking and brainstorming in the event of inspiration. Her notebook also acts as a reminder of the need to brainstorm to maintain a "successful," frequently updated blog. The notebook and Megan's body form a "human-nonhuman assemblage" (Taylor, 2013) allowing her blogging process to cross time and space. This assemblage also materializes Megan as a "good," dedicated activist blogger.

² Bracketed texts indicate my comments during the interviews. Comments in square brackets note where participants' comments were modified during transcription for clarity.

When explaining the blogging process and her blogging schedule, Sama spoke about the pressure to frequently create new content to post to her blog. Sama said:

In an ideal life, I would plan all of my weekly posts on Saturday, figure out what collage I want for each post, and begin to write my Monday post. I would also plan long term projects that combine fashion and politics and be better at using social media for Shine Theory to grow my platform. In reality, I'm a mess lol. I really try to designate time to sit down and write my posts for the day after, but I get caught up in other things or I have writer's block, so I always try to read and get inspired by other things around me.

Like Megan, Sama explained how her blogging permeates other parts of her life and how she is inspired by things around her and this shapes what she writes. Their comments challenge a distinction between online and offline, as their blogging and blog are omnipresent in their lived experiences, following them beyond a screen. Sama's distinction between her "ideal" schedule and her "real" schedule are likely connected to broader discourses related to blogging, including expectations that bloggers will consistently post high-quality content across social media platforms, a point I discuss more deeply in theme two. The rigor and strategy of Sama's "ideal" schedule stands in contrast to her "reality," pointing to the shifting, dynamic and complex nature of activist blogging. Her comments offer insight into the sometimes-chaotic process of activist blogging, wherein the process is shaped by expectations related to blogging success, interwoven with materialities such as technology, art (i.e. collages), books and other challenges such as writer's block.

In my analysis of the blogs, I noticed the importance of various forms of digital media art in the intra-activity of activist blogging. Barad explains that through intra-actions, "boundaries and properties of the components of phenomena become determinate and that

particular concepts (that is, particular material articulations of the world) become meaningful” (2007, p. 139). In this section, I discuss how the presence of digital media art as one part of the intra-activity of activist blogging, had implications for the representations and meanings of activism, art and blogging. Various forms of digital media art were used on *Acteevism*, *Tolly Dolly Posh Fashion*, *Shine Theory* and *Faces of Feminism*, including digitally drawn illustrations, curated collages, posters, and photography. I was particularly struck by the use of collages on *Shine Theory*, because they worked as another material representation of the blogger’s message beyond the written prose style consistent across many of the blogs I analyzed. The collages also prompt the reader to pause, reflect and think about how they relate to the blog post. I focus on two examples of digital art from *Shine Theory*.³ The first collage is part of a blog post titled “The intersection of fashion and politics” that explained how the blogger saw fashion as a way to act on political and activist beliefs, challenging the assumption that fashion and feminism are mutually exclusive (2019, October 14). The blogger also argued in this post that there has been a commodification of activist and ethical apparel, suggesting that consumers need to be critical of where and how activist-labelled clothing is made. The accompanied collage adds to and deepens her writing. The silhouette of a young woman wearing a dress with various eyes might point to the way the blogger sees women’s bodies and fashion as the site of gaze and judgement. The collage text “the girls are watching” might be related to her argument that feminism and fashion are not mutually exclusive, and that despite sexist stereotypes and expectations that girls and women should be complicit, they can be passionate about both fashion and politics. While reading this blog post and pondering the accompanied collage I was curious about the silhouette of the woman in the collage and wondered if this was an attempt by the

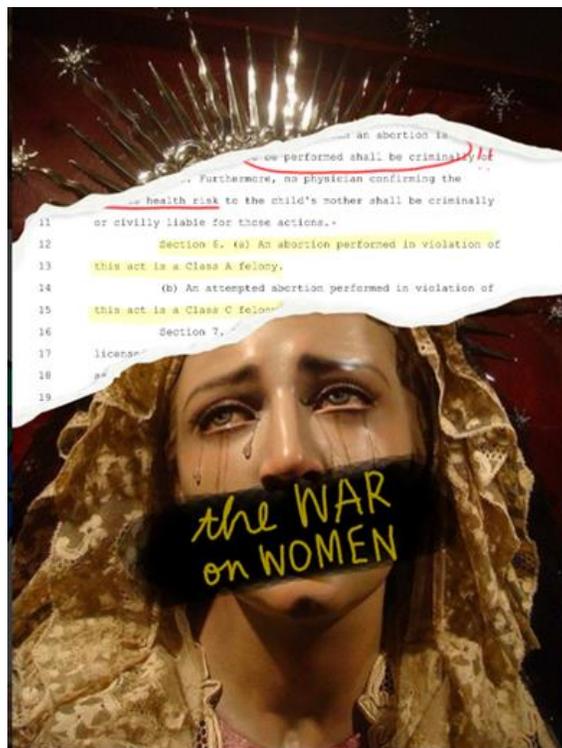
³ The blogger granted permission to include these collages in this thesis.

blogger to challenge the framing of fashion-lovers as void of political critique and feminist beliefs, or a way for the blogger to highlight the possibility for fashion and feminism to co-exist in conversations around girls and women. In this example, the materiality of the collage, including the edited photographs and the accompanied text are central to the impact of the blog post.



The collage below is part of the blog post titled “Keep your laws off my body,” which discusses women’s rights, abortion laws and governmental power in the United States of America (2019, May 30). The collage foregrounds a section of written policy that has been edited and highlighted by the blogger and a photo of a crying woman wearing a crown. I would argue that both of these examples in and of themselves should be seen as arts-based approaches to activism, as the blogger co-creates an evocative material-discursive engagement with gender to share a politically engaged message. Similar to other researchers, I think that art and art-making practices are often connected to experiences and engagement with the social and political

world, offering insight into personal imagined ideals of social justice (e.g. Bayerbach & Ramalho, 2011; Dyer, 2019). When these collages are read as “aesthetic texts” (Dyer, 2019), we can see how they are entangled with the meanings and boundaries within the blog post, the bloggers’ lived experiences and imagined ideals, and the context in which they were created.



In my conversation with Megan, she spoke about her blog as a creative outlet and the materiality of the blogging process as an essential, cathartic experience. Megan said:

Uhm, and I think I, this is gonna sound funny, I got my aura photographed [laughs] ... and basically mine had this big pink-purple circle over the top of my head and that means basically that I am a creative soul. And the way she interpreted it was that I need something outside of a typical 9 to 5 job, (right) even if it’s a creative job, like I need some kind of a personal creative outlet to talk about what’s important to me, and my blog has always felt like that.

In this example, Megan frames her blog and the practice of blogging as an essential creative outlet. By positioning her blog and blogging in this way, she argues that creativity and focus on long-term projects is something she “needs.” Similarly, Sama told me that she blogs in part because she felt she did not have a voice “in the grand scheme of things” and said “even though at times it feels like I’m talking into a vacuum, I feel satisfied just getting my thoughts on a screen with artwork that manifests the messages that I’m trying to convey.” When young women’s activist blogs are viewed as a collection or “archive of aesthetics texts” (Dyer, 2019) including various forms of digital media art, it is possible to see how the intra-active blogging process offers potential for aesthetic experiences and expressions wherein bloggers feel, think, and express within entanglements of affect, materialities and discourses. Interestingly, despite sharing that their blogs and blogging help them to create and be creative, the young women I spoke to did not emphasize the ways that their blogs and the various forms of digital media art on them can inspire or motivate activism. This may reflect the shifting, broad and sometimes ambiguous nature of the young women’s meanings and boundaries of activism, and whether they see their blogging as activism, a point I return to later. Alternatively, the young women might not have spoken about the possibility of their blogs to inspire or motivate activism because they are unable to see their blogging as separate from other aspects of their lives, including other ways that they mobilize their activism.

In addition to positioning their blogging as a creative outlet, inspiration was something that both Megan and Sama emphasized as important to the blogging process. Megan noted that writing a single blog post could take days, weeks or hours depending on the topic, her passion and inspiration to create. Megan continued to explain that if she has a “burning thought” she is able to write blog posts quickly, which was also evident in Sama’s comments. Although Sama

noted that being inspired and passionate about a topic made her blogging process more efficient as she was able to create content quicker, she worried about the implications of creating content based on her emotions:

I try not to force inspiration from myself because the results will typically be really dry and lack emotion. If I'm extremely passionate about something, the writing will come so easily, I don't even have to think about it so relying on my emotions to create content isn't the best strategy because it's typically sporadic, but it's what's working for me right now.

Sama's comments illustrate the inconsistency of the timing of blogging process, wherein an affective attachment to the content makes writing "easy," and lack of inspiration makes the process longer. She also suggested that there is a tension between posting frequently and posting content that is engaging and even emotional. In this example, both discourses and narratives related to what makes a "good" blogger and a "good" blog post are entangled with the materialities of blogging, including planning, writing and posting.

The bloggers also suggested that the blogging process was not linear. They would sometimes begin with the written content and other times work on photography and collages for the blog post before the written part of the post was drafted. For example, Tolly shared:

I usually use a digital notepad to draft out blog post ideas before putting together photography or graphics to go alongside it. Sometimes I work the other way around, especially when I'm publishing something like a photoshoot where the photography is the main focus over the text.

In this example, Tolly, like Megan and Sama, emphasizes the importance of a notebook in the blogging process, blurring online and offline work. However, Tolly's example also highlights the shifting nature of her blogging process linked to the topic of a post.

Through the young women's comments, it became clear that the blogging process was complex, involving writing, inspiration, objects, time, space and emotion. The complexity of the blogging process was best illustrated when Megan explained what happened after writing a draft of a blog post:

...I do search engine optimization, so that people can find it more easily on Google, and I do all the, like keyword searching, and make sure it is in the right category for my blog...Uhm, I take most of my own photos (okay) so I have like a tripod with a selfie timer, uhm, so that takes work (yeah) and kind of strength [laughs] to go out in public and take photos of yourself (totally, yeah)... and then also deciding how you're gonna talk about that on your other platforms...then once you post it, like getting people to read it, or talk about it, or share it. Uhm, I just started a newsletter last week (okay, yup) because I think that's another avenue where I could get people to read things or engage with things more. So there's a lot that goes into (yeah) doing an actual post (mhmm) uhm, probably even more. Like now talking about it, it's way more than I give myself credit for doing, but yeah it's a lot.

Megan highlights how various materialities such as technology, including search engine optimization, taking photos in public with a selfie timer and promoting the new blog post on other platforms are all part of the blogging process. Arguably, the specifics of each of the steps Megan outlines are connected to the nature of the content in the blog post. For example, it is possible that she might not need to go out in public to take photos for all posts. Further, the role

of technology in promoting her blog also shifts. She suggested that she needs to develop a way to get people to engage with and read her blog, which is likely shaped by what she is blogging about. For example, she likely promotes a more vulnerable post about her thoughts on sustainability and privilege differently than a post with various ethically made clothing items. Through this example, we learn that blogging involves more than writing; the process is shaped by various material-discursive entanglements and the content of the blog co-constitutes the blogging process.

The bloggers also spoke about the relevance of time in blogging, especially as a challenge. For example, Megan told me that she spends at least a few hours each day working on her blog and Sama explained that various demands in her life can make it challenging to also dedicate time each week to her blog. Sama seemed to be motivated to build her blogging platform, having recently upgraded from Tumblr to an actual website. She shared that she is “posting (or trying to) 5 days a week” but noted that this was a lot to handle while being a junior in high school, having a part time job and participating in extracurriculars. In another example, Tolly said:

At the beginning...I had a lot of spare time and I was just posting for fun. My original posts were of very low quality compared to the content that I’m creating now; I tend to manage about 1 or 2 blog posts a month at the moment, whereas back then it was multiple times a week.

Tolly’s comments highlight the entangled nature of the blogging process. Having spare time, creating multiple low-quality blog posts, and posting for fun meant that she did not have many challenges at the beginning of her blogging. Tolly argues that the quality and aim of her posts and blog has evolved, requiring more time to create content, ultimately limiting how often she is

able to post new content. In this example, time, the space of her blog and its aims, the materiality of the blogging process and motivations to post high quality content perhaps related to expectations of activist bloggers, entangle and intra-act to co-produce the blogging process.

The importance of materiality in the young women's activist blogging was also evident in the bloggers' comments on where they work on their blog and what they do while they blog. Tolly stated that she usually worked on her blog at home and sometimes listened to music while working on her blog. Like Tolly, Sama and Megan shared that they tend to work on the writing aspect of blogging at home in their bedrooms, at a desk or on their beds. When asked where she works on her blog Sama said "honestly, anywhere that I have wifi." With Barad (2007), wifi is a materiality that has force to enact agential cuts in the intra-activity of activist blogging. For example, the strength of a wifi signal, interruptions in wifi, the number of spaces with wifi signal and the cost of wifi create differences in young women's blogging practices. Sama further explained:

I mostly write on my laptop now because my thoughts run through my mind faster than I can write with my hands, so typing works best for my crazy mind lol. For the most part, it'll be at my house and mostly after school.

Sama's comments highlight the relation between materialities, including wifi and her laptop, her body and space and the intra-activity of activist blogging. While Megan noted that she tended to write in her bedroom, she said "I end up doing a lot of like the meaty-like thinking about things just wherever I am in my notebook, like just with bullet-points." She told me that she wants the blogging process to feel "authentic," instead of her deciding to sit down and write a post because then the process takes longer. Megan admitted that she frequently multi-tasks and this activity shapes where and how she blogs. Megan said:

I have like, I wouldn't say hundreds of tabs, but definitely fifteen tabs or more open on my computer at any time that I am working on my blog. So, it could be that I'm trying to do a homework assignment and I don't want to do that so I start working on my blog and it's open in another tab. Uhm, or I'm like listening to music and also working on it, or waiting for class to start and typing something up...so yeah I definitely have a lot of things going on all at the same time [laughs]. But normally it's not like I am physically trying to do something else. Like I am not cleaning my room (right) or cooking a meal and trying to type, it's like something else that I am doing on my computer.

Megan's comment works to illuminate the complexity of intra-activity. By suggesting that she has multiple tabs open on her laptop while blogging it becomes clear that blogging, as a phenomenon, does not occur in isolation. Curiously, Megan is quick to clarify that she is not "physically trying to do something else" outside of her computer while blogging. While this example points to the messiness of existence and phenomena, this messiness is clearest through technology as we can see multiple things (e.g. tabs, task switching) occurring during the completion of a single task. Taken together, these examples show that young women's blogging is not confined to their laptop in their bedrooms, but travels with them, as their notebooks and laptops are with them most of the time and in various spaces.

Overall, the young women's comments highlight the complex, shifting nature of the blogging process. They point towards multiple components that shape the intra-activity of activist blogging, including materialities (e.g. laptops, notebooks, cameras, search engine optimization, desks, music, digital media art), discourses related to "good" blog posts and "good" bloggers, space (e.g. bedroom, outside class), time and how all these aspects are entangled and co-constituting. A posthuman analysis pushes past simplistic framings of the

blogging process, works to decenter humans in blogging and highlight the importance of both the human and non-human in the blogging process. I chose to discuss the intra-activity of activist blogging at the start of this chapter with the hope that it helps readers can get a feel for what is happening when young women blog, as well as illustrating the necessity of an analysis focused on material-discursive contexts.

Theme Two: The Embodiment of Neoliberal Activist (Influencer) Subjectivities

The second emerging theme in my analysis is the embodiment of neoliberal activist (influencer) subjectivities. Through my analysis of the blogs and interviews, it became clear that the young women's blogging was embedded in an ethos of neoliberalism. For the purpose of this project, neoliberalism can be understood as a system of governing policies and practices that position market economies as the central mechanism for distributing social goods and regulating behaviour (Brock et al., 2019). Discourses of neoliberalism position individual subjects as solely responsible for their own success and unfettered by intersecting inequalities (Brock et al., 2019). Neoliberalism was apparent as part of the intra-activity of activist blogging through self-promotion, branding of the blogs and their own subjectivities as bloggers, as well as entrepreneurship through brand deals and sponsored posts. The bloggers' reflections on managing expectations of an individualized, successful girl blogger highlight the effects neoliberalism. During my analysis, I saw clear connections between the construction of a neoliberal girl activist as an empowered, motivated girl who is committed and able to use technology to do something "good" (e.g. Herrero-Diz & Ramos-Serrano, 2018), and the influencer subjectivity present in the current digital age. I understand an influencer to be someone who has a substantial online following, a cohesive online brand and self-presentation, and who produces content on social media (i.e. via YouTube, Instagram, etc.) as their job.

Influencers are supported through brand deals and sponsorships, a management and agent team, and are sometimes involved in the creation of their own merchandise which they sell to their followers. Thus, I call this theme the embodiment of neoliberal activist (influencer) subjectivities to highlight the connections and tensions between expectations of neoliberal activists and influencers and how these expectations translate when materialized on activist blogs and embodied by activist bloggers. My discussion in this theme is divided into three subthemes: branding the self; blogs as entrepreneurial; and blogger expectations and norms.

Subtheme: Branding the Self

While analyzing the blogs I immediately noticed that each blog had a cohesive brand which was achieved with a logo, a motto or aim for the blog usually located in an “about” section, and a consistent writing and blog post style. Four of the five blogs that I analyzed had a more sophisticated and professional “feel” and look, including having blog posts organized by category and foregrounding the blogger with a biography, links to their online collaborations with other blogs and media appearances, as well as numerous photographs on the blog throughout featuring the bloggers. In contrast, the fifth blog, *Shine Theory* read more like a personal diary, containing scanned images of handwritten diary pages, and did not position the blogger overtly by name in an extensive biography section. Various materialities such as font styles, font sizes and colour, digitally drawn logos and the use of digital media art (e.g. collages, photographs) worked to create a brand for the blog and the blogger. For example, three of the blogs used a consistent signature sign-off often including the bloggers’ names and a phrase like “lots of love” to conclude each of their blog posts. Writing with a consistent font worked to establish a familiar “feel” and look across each of the blog posts on the blog, while also positioning the blogger in relation to the reader as a peer or friend.

While the use of technology as a materiality to cultivate a brand for the blog and bloggers might be read as intentional by the bloggers, I rely on Barad (2007) to argue that we must see the branding as a result of multiple agencies working together to co-produce the brand. It is not that technology and other materialities have agency, rather such materialities are active in the intra-activity, thus entangling to co-produce agencies and the possibilities of branding the bloggers and blogs (Barad, 2007). Thus, we cannot center the bloggers as intentional, agentic beings as they are only one part of the entanglement. By seeing technology as active and co-constituting the branding of the bloggers and blogs, it is possible to consider how different technologies offer different potentials for branding. For example, the use of consistent font styles and colour, digitally illustrated logos and photography each shape the intra-activity of the branding differently. Therefore, the outcome of the intra-activity, or the branding of the blogger and blog cannot be seen as separate from the specificity of the entanglement. In other words, the branding of the blogs and bloggers cannot be fully conceptualized without thinking about the various materialities such as technology, writing, images and art that co-produce the brand.

The importance of building a platform and an online brand or image as an activist blogger was emphasized by the young women that I interviewed. Developing an online brand for themselves and their blog was seen as an important part of becoming an established blogger, developing an online following and cultivating an activist community. When asked what skills are required to develop and maintain a blog, Tolly said “an understanding of web design and knowing how to write confidently, as well as a grasp on how to communicate on social media, both in terms of connecting with an audience and in terms of marketing and promotion.” Tolly further suggested that a “...strong eye for design is always helpful, too.” Tolly argues that technological and writing skills are important for bloggers, but she also suggests that bloggers

should know how to communicate with an audience on other platforms to promote their blogs, and arguably themselves as activist bloggers. Both Tolly and Sama shared that digital art, including collages and digital illustrations were an important part of their online brand because it helped them to have a consistent style across social media accounts and made their blog distinguishable and unique. Megan also spoke about the importance of developing an online brand as an activist blogger:

I don't know that this is always necessary but, I think your personal brand, or your branding is important (right). Like I feel like I have a pretty clear set of values or like things that I talk about on my blog, uhm, and that's important if you are trying to reach a certain audience, you want them to know exactly what they can get from you...So especially in the kind of activism space, if people are just spewing information at you, like "this is what you need to do," like "you'll change the world if you do this" like it's a lot more inspiring if you trust the person, and you will listen a lot more... you have to build that kind of trust.

Megan explained that part of developing her online brand involved paying a monthly fee to have a self-hosted website, paying someone to design a logo that she uses on her blog and other social media pages, and maintaining an online presence across various platforms. Tolly's and Megan's examples illustrate the role of materialities (web design, logos) and discourses around being a "good" trustworthy, successful blogger and activist in the production of an online brand.

Branding is a useful example of the ways that activist subjectivities and blogging are shaped and produced by things, as well as how branding shapes the meanings of specific materialities (e.g. logos, blog format). Through Barad (2003), the young women's comments about branding and the construction of a "good" activist blogger illustrate the inseparability of materialities and

discourses. Barad explains “it is not merely that there are important material factors in addition to discursive ones; rather, the issue is the conjoined material-discursive nature of constraints, conditions and practices” (2003, p. 823). The “conjoined material-discursive” contexts in young women’s activist blogging generate and restrict the possibilities for their blogging and co-constitute their meanings of activist subjectivities (Barad, 2003, p. 823). It is also clear in Tolly’s and Megan’s comments that developing an online brand as an activist blogger requires leisure time and money, as well as technological and marketing skills, reflecting arguments made by Keller (2016) about the role of social class and privilege in girls’ and young women’s blogging.

I conclude my discussion of this subtheme by arguing that the young women’s blogs in my sample should be seen as only one part of the bloggers’ online activist subjectivities and online presence. While analyzing the blogs, I noticed that all of the blogs had links to the bloggers’ other social media accounts which were associated with their blogs and were not merely personal accounts. The young women spoke about engaging across different social media platforms differently, and how doing so helps them to be transparent with their followers, build trust, as well as cultivate and maintain an online community of like-minded young people. For example, Tolly told me that she updates her blog less regularly than her other social media pages because it takes longer to form blog posts, and she uses various other social media to discuss “...a wider range of topics, updating my followers on a more personal level and for promoting the content that goes on my blog.” Tolly said she sees her blog and associated social media accounts as “both separate and intertwined” (see also Erz & Christensen, 2018). Megan also spoke to the different ways she uses social media to engage with her audience, related to the possibilities and technological affordances of each space as well as norms related to the kind of content in each space (e.g. Keller, 2019). Megan explained:

...with Instagram, I can just share a photo of my shoes and be like “got these at the thrift store, how cool”...my audience likes both of that kind of content, like they can really see what I am thinking about in my long-form pieces on my blog but also can see more of my day-to-day (right) on my Instagram...

Taken together, these examples suggest that young women who are activist bloggers are engaging online in various ways, to promote their blogs and themselves as bloggers, but also to develop and maintain an online self-presentation as an activist blogger, reflecting findings from other researchers (Hill, 2017; Dejmanee, 2018; Keller, 2019; Kim & Ringrose, 2018).

Subtheme: Blogs as Entrepreneurial

Three of the blogs in my sample contained sponsored blog content and collaborations with brands. Such sponsored content was most prevalent on *Tolly Dolly Posh Fashion* and *Acteevism*, meaning the bloggers work with brands to advertise products and make a small commission when readers purchase said products using the hyperlinks on their blog. *Life of a Blind Girl*, *Tolly Dolly Posh Fashion* and *Acteevism* all had sections on their blog dedicated to information related to sponsorships and public relations, including how they disclose when content is sponsored and links are affiliate, as well as how companies can get in touch with them to collaborate on blog content. In some ways, this section of the blogs seemed like an attempt to be transparent with their readers, noting what it means to write sponsored content and use affiliate links, and emphasizing that they only work with brands whose ethics align with their activist beliefs. This may be reflective of Megan’s aforementioned comment on the importance of developing trust with readers of her blog. During my analysis of the entrepreneurial aspect of the young women’s blogs, it was evident that the ways technologies (e.g. hyperlinks, disclosure pages) and their capacities were mobilized mattered, as they co-constituted and complicated

meanings and boundaries of activism, activist blogging, as well as norms and expectations of “good” bloggers. The entrepreneurial “feel” of the blogs was materialized through sponsored blog content and the promotion of the blogs and bloggers across social media platforms. The material-discursive contexts that generated the possibilities for blogs to become entrepreneurial echo a focus on individualized entrepreneurship, branding and marketing within a neoliberal system (Hill, 2017; Erz & Christensen, 2018; Dejmanee, 2018).

Of the three blogs that had sponsored blog content, *Acteevism* and *Tolly Dolly Posh Fashion* seemed to be the most visibly entrepreneurial. For example, their disclosures about sponsorships, public relations and connecting with brands made it clear that blogging was not just a hobby for them, but also an opportunity to make money. In addition, these bloggers positioned themselves overtly on their blogs, within biography sections and with several photographs of themselves in their posts. This made it feel like the blog was partly about themselves as activists and influencers, in addition to being about mobilizing their activist beliefs and creating an online community. I argue that the entrepreneurial feel of the blogs *Tolly Dolly Posh Fashion* and *Acteevism* was generated through specific material-discursive contexts. Specifically, *Acteevism* has an “affiliated with” textbox in the right margin of the main page of the blog noting that the blogger is affiliated with an ethical clothing brand and is part of “InfluenCHER Collective” which connects brands with female influencers. *Tolly Dolly Posh Fashion* has a bright banner across the top of the blog reading “shop my collection” which directed readers to an ethical clothing company’s website and merchandise the blogger had created in collaboration with the brand. *Tolly Dolly Posh Fashion* also has a tab called “illustration” containing details about her work as a digital designer and artist including GIFS (i.e. digitally drawn stickers that sometimes move) that she created for brands to use for

marketing on Instagram, and information for brands and companies who are interested in collaborating with her on projects. Taken together, these examples gave the impression that the young women saw blogging as an opportunity to create an online platform, develop an online following and collaborate to create with brands, while mobilizing their activism on their blogs and other social media pages.

Although I have outlined how blogs can be entrepreneurial, I want to emphasize that making money through blogging is not something that is equally available for all bloggers. Collaborating with brands to write sponsored content requires time, resources and connections. Such collaboration might also require the blog and blogger to have a certain “look” and “feel” that matches the brands’ desires. For example, *Acteevism* is a part of a collective of influencers, a hub online where brands can find suitable influencers to work with. Arguably, bloggers with an established blog with many readers and followers across social media platforms are more likely to work with brands. Connected to the broader theme about the embodiment of neoliberal activist (influencer) subjectivities, branding themselves across various social media platforms and developing a cohesive brand for their blog might make certain blogs and bloggers more appealing to companies to work with. For example, Erz and Christensen (2018) explain that developing sponsored blog content involves managing an online self-presentation and brand, finding brands and companies that align with the blogger’s brand, successfully developing contracts and schedules to post content and continuously contextualizing the sponsored content to remain relevant to their blog brand and audience. The authors challenge the simplistic framing of bloggers as consumers who become “creators or mediators of brand-related content” by arguing that there is a dynamic reciprocity between the blogger’s projects, personal brand and brand collaborations (p. 74). I contend that intersections of privilege and marginalization,

including access to resources, having a certain “look” and online brand influence the process of developing sponsored blog content that Erz and Christensen (2018) discuss. There is a need for more qualitative research centered on the ways that sponsored social media content, blogging “success” and the rise of micro-celebrity social media influencers reflect broader systems of power.

The theme of entrepreneurship and blogs/blogging as entrepreneurial also came up in my conversation with Megan. Megan told me that she started her blog after attending a summer camp about business and fashion. She shared that when she created her blog as a teenager her parents thought it was “cool” and “entrepreneurial.” She said that she was inspired to start blogging because she wanted to receive free clothes to review on her blog like other successful, established fashion bloggers she met at the summer camp. Megan’s comments point to a shift in digital culture wherein blogging was becoming popular and seen as something that was “cool.” Her comments also illustrate the various material-discursive contexts that generate the possibilities for her blogging. Specifically, supportive family, resources to attend business and blogging camps as a teen and the associations between established fashion bloggers, receiving free clothes and writing posts about their outfits. Arguably, attending a business and blogging camp provided Megan with access to information and “how-to” that helped her to start her blog and begin to develop an online brand and following, as well as giving her the opportunity to network with other bloggers.

As outlined in my discussion of the style and format of the blog posts, some of the blogs contained sponsored content and affiliate links wherein the bloggers were promoting products and reviewing products in their blog posts, linking the blogs to consumerism. This has implications, especially for the bloggers that aimed to promote ethical consumption and

dedicated their blog to critical discussions about climate change and sustainability. On the one hand, the bloggers were aware of the need to shop less and reduce waste, but on the other hand they were encouraging their readers to buy things. While I do not aim to suggest that it is problematic for the young women bloggers to collaborate with brands and earn a small commission when their readers purchase products that they mention, I want to highlight how this may create tensions between their subjectivities as environmental activists and bloggers. For example, while there might be less ethical tension for a fashion blogger to receive free clothes to promote on their blogs, it is likely that the activist bloggers in my sample experience tension between wanting to be successful bloggers through collaborating with brands, and also wanting to avoid constantly promoting consumption. This tension might also be gendered, wherein young women who blog might feel pressured to collaborate with brands in order to improve their status bloggers and make money, things that might be seen as normalized, idealized activity for young women who blog, even when such activities conflict with the overall activist and/or sustainability message of their blog.

Subtheme: Blogger Expectations and Norms

Although I never asked the young women questions about what makes a “good” or “successful” blogger, during analysis, it emerged as a recurring theme woven into their comments. In one example, Sama explained that she had recently upgraded her original Tumblr blog to a more formal website. She said “...since creating a Tumblr blog, I’ve upgraded to a website as a way to try to be more consistent and “professional” lol but my goal and voice has always stayed the same.” In this example, a Tumblr blog, which is available for free with the creation of a profile, is constructed as less professional, and not motivating her to consistently post. As previously discussed, Megan also shared that she pays a monthly fee for a self-hosted

website and hired someone to design a logo that she uses across social media platforms connected to her blog, again pointing to the relevance of social class and money in blogging. Here, the space of the blog (Tumblr versus self-hosted website) co-constitutes Sama's perception of the legitimacy and "professionalism" of blogging. Barad (2007) might argue that the intra-activity of Sama's blogging practices works to mark the importance of space. Barad explains "iterative intra-actions are the dynamics through which temporality and spatiality are produced and iteratively reconfigured in the materialization of phenomena and the (re)making of material-discursive boundaries and their constitutive exclusions (2007, p. 234). As evident in this quotation, Barad asserts that space is intra-actively produced in specific reconfigurations of entanglements, which challenges the framing of space as a void location or container for matter to inhabit. Therefore, blogging spaces are not "empty" spaces or containers (Barad, 2007), rather, they have material-discursive power, as reflected in Sama's comments on professionalism. Further, spaces and their boundaries are open, and intra-actively produced within specific entanglements. The entangled material-discursive contexts that generate Sama's meanings and boundaries of activist blogging and bloggers are inseparable from the specific reconfigurations of space and matter in the intra-activity.

Compared to the other young women I spoke to, Sama felt overwhelmed and worried about the pressure to meet the expectations of a "good," "successful" blogger. Sama said:

As you can see with my website, it hardly has content up because it's been hard for me to be consistent with my posting... I would be so hard on myself as well, when I didn't end up posting something because I was trying so hard to build a platform and community of followers who enjoyed what I was writing. It got to the point that I just didn't want to do it anymore because of the stress that it was causing, but I had to keep reminding myself

of my intentions with the blog and website. Like, why am I doing this? Is it to get clout, or make a difference in my community? These days, it seems like they are interchangeable; like if you are an activist, you're probably very popular online so I've been trying to understand the difference for myself so I don't get hung up on the amount of likes or reblogs or page views I get each day.

Sama poignantly illustrates the challenges involved in embodying an activist subjectivity through blogging in a digital culture that celebrates individual success, especially individual activist heroes or activist stars (Bent, 2020). She questions whether a "good" activist blogger blogs to get "clout" or status online, reflecting the construction of an idealized social media influencer, or whether they blog to mobilize and educate. In this example, the materiality of her blogging (i.e. how frequently she blogs), where she blogs (Tumblr blog or website), why she blogs, as well as inspiration, anxiety and pressures around time influence how she understands the expectations of activist blogging.

In addition to feeling pressure to blog frequently, Sama shared how technology and her meanings of it frequently shaped and were shaped by how she thought about herself as an activist who mobilizes their activism online. Sama saw social media, a form of technology that includes posting content and interacting with a network of people, as something that was both good and bad as an activist blogger. Sama told me:

...when I'm scrolling through Instagram and see a girl who has found success through advocating for a certain thing, I sometimes get jealous of that and doubt my abilities to do the same because when there isn't much response on the things that you put so much time and effort into, you can get easily discouraged. But at the same time, it can also be encouraging and motivating. It's weird because it all depends on my mood honestly.

Sama's comments highlight the material and affective power of social media, and its capacities to influence her meanings and boundaries of activism and her perceived self-worth as an activist blogger. Such meanings and boundaries are co-constituted by her understandings of social media, people's reactions to content on social media, discourses of "good" bloggers, broader narratives of exceptional girl activists (e.g. Bent 2020; Taft, 2017) and neoliberal girl power framings of young women as empowered and capable of using technology to advocate for social change (Herrero-Diz & Ramos-Serrano, 2018). Such meanings are inseparable from the ways that materialities (e.g. videos, images) posted on social media sites such as Instagram intra-act with algorithms and norms around the type of content to post in certain social media platforms (e.g. Keller, 2019).

The pressure to conform to the expectations of bloggers held by the bloggers and their audiences was also evident in one of the blog posts I analyzed on *Shine Theory* (2019, July,17). In a blog post titled "Dear Diary" the blogger shares her experiences with blogging, including her hopes and fears about being a blogger. The blog post feels personal, vulnerable and intimate, because it is a scanned, hand-written diary entry written in black and pink pen and decorated with hand-drawn doodles and stickers. The style of the post differs from the other posts on the blog, which makes the reader feel closer to the blogger, as if they are reading an entry of their diary. In this post, the blogger writes:

I felt a pressure to get this blog successful before a certain age, idk why. And this type of pressure was different from the I-need-to-turn-my-essay-in-in-15-minutes pressure it was a kind filled w/ despair + hopelessness, it didn't motivate me to work harder, rather I lost motivation (Shine Theory, 2019, July 17).

The pressure to succeed as a blogger is evident in this example, which the blogger notes is different than any pressure she feels doing schoolwork. Relating to my earlier discussions of the material-discursive power of social media, the blogger's comments powerfully illustrate the challenges of having an online, public self-presentation and how these meanings and boundaries are constructed in entanglements of technology-discourse-space-time. Such challenges are connected to aforementioned expectations of "good" successful blogging, as well as problematic neoliberal girl power narratives that reproduce an individualized, empowered, successful—sometimes celebrity girl activist, who is unfettered by sexism and/or intersecting inequalities (e.g. Bent, 2020; Keller, 2016; Taft, 2017). The connection between lack of blogging success, despair and hopelessness points to the weight that bloggers attach to their blog and blogging processes as materialities, and how such materialities co-constitute perceptions of blogging success and themselves as activist bloggers.

Like Sama, Megan also shared how she navigates expectations of bloggers and stereotypes of bloggers and influencers. Megan told me that she was afraid at first to tell her family and friends that she had started a blog and kept her blog a secret for the first few months that she had it. Megan explained:

Like, I was definitely afraid of judgment (right), like putting yourself out there on the Internet, uhm, is hard, and still to this day I feel like it is difficult for me to talk about with people that I know...there's just like all of these misconceptions about influencers, and bloggers, and people who do social media. And so as a woman especially in that kind of space, as a young woman I feel like it can be difficult to talk about and be proud of when there are a lot of like (mhmm) judgments or, pre-conceived ideas.

Megan shares that the negative construction of bloggers and influencers in digital culture and popular conversation can make her hesitate to talk about her blog. Megan's comments point to the relevance of gender, arguing that when girls and women are bloggers and influencers on social media, it might be harder for them to be overtly proud of what they do in the face of these stereotypes.

Although I rely on Sama's and Megan's comments in this subtheme, it is important to note that during my initial contact with Tolly she told me that she was currently overwhelmed with the number of projects she was involved with, thus also highlighting the intensity of being an online activist blogger and influencer. Taken together, these examples illustrate the complexity of embodying and mobilizing an activist subjectivity in a digital era with high expectations of both bloggers and activists, especially young (girl) activists who are popularly positioned as tech-savvy leaders of social change. The young women's discussion of the pressures and expectations of activist bloggers disrupt the reductionist approach to activism that is evident in girl power narratives by highlighting the ways that young women's meanings of blogging and their self-concept as bloggers reflects broader norms and expectations of bloggers and activists in current digital cultures.

To summarize, the second emerging theme in my analysis is the embodiment of neoliberal activist (influencer) subjectivities. As evident in my analysis of the blogs and my conversations with the bloggers, specific material-discursive contexts co-produce brands for the blogs and the bloggers that are used across social media platforms. Such branding is embedded within a neoliberal ethos of individual success, self-promotion, and reflective of a shift in current digital culture where some individuals become influencers on social media. In addition, blogs and blogging can be entrepreneurial for some, including opportunities for money-making via

sponsored content and collaborations with brands. Further, the young women identified expectations of “good,” “successful” bloggers that were embedded in entanglements of materialities and discourses. I discussed how expectations of “good” bloggers are connected to neoliberal individualism, successful entrepreneurship, branding and consumerism. Overall, I have highlighted how activist blogging is reflective of influencer culture and how activist bloggers navigate and embody expectations of bloggers and influencers.

Theme Three: The Mobilization of Activism

The third emerging theme in my analysis is the mobilization of activism. In this theme, I aim to highlight the complexity of mobilizing activism online via blogs, arguing for a need to conceptualize young women’s activism within shifting entanglements of digital art, social media, space, time and intersecting social factors of privilege and marginalization, as well as discourses of activism. My discussion in this theme is organized into three subthemes: activist blogging; representations of activism; and defining activism and activist subjectivities.

Subtheme: Activist Blogging

During my analysis of the blogs in my sample, I discovered that young women’s online activism occurs in various online spaces including blogs and associated social media accounts. On their blogs, the emphasis is on education about political and social issues, learning from and with their readers, as well as connecting issues of social justice to their lives and the lives of their readers. For example, *Faces of Feminism* has a tab/category on their blog called “Stay informed” which includes numerous posts about varying issues, including access to menstruation products, challenging gun violence, women’s marches, abortion and reproductive rights, voting/elections, immigration and deportation, intersectional feminism and LGBTQ+ communities. The blogger

explains that “staying informed and aware is the first step to being a great feminist and activist! On this page, you can find information on current women's rights issues and other news concerning women.” (Faces of Feminism, n.d.c). Similarly, on *Life of A Blind Girl*, the blogger generated a list of “useful resources” for readers, including hyperlinks to articles about disability and visual impairment and charities and organizations focused on disability. The blogger notes that she compiled this list of resources as a way to streamline the onerous process of finding disability-specific magazines, articles and organizations. In these examples, informative articles, hyperlinked articles and labelled sections of the blog co-produce a blogging space that is focused on cultivating a community of informed readers.

In addition to being focused on education, many of the blog posts that I analyzed have a “call to action” for the readers, urging them to do something after reading the blog post to make a change in their lives connected to the topic of the blog post. These “calls to actions” often included providing ways for readers to make a change in their own lives to help, prompting readers to read more about the issue, encouraging readers to educate friends and families, call representatives, share their ideas by commenting on the blog post donate to charities and share the blog post on their personal socials with their own networks. For example, in a post titled “Period inequity” on *Faces of Feminism* (n.d.b), readers are encouraged to “take a step in the right direction” by donating period supplies to homeless shelters or considering starting a “period chapter” at their school or in their communities to raise awareness about period inequality. These “calls to action” trouble limiting constructions of young people’s activism through a binary of online/offline (e.g. Tupper, 2014; Milošević-Dordević, & Žeželj, 2017), highlighting that young people’s activism transcends a binary of online/offline and is reconfigured across time and space. Sometimes the “call to action” was about encouraging the readers to engage with the post and the

topic in the comments section by responding to posed questions or offering their own ideas, suggesting that the blog space is partly about learning together, and not just positioning the blogger as the “knower.” While this tactic might be a way to foster an online community in the blogging space, it might also be connected to norms and expectations around bloggers and activist (influencers). For example, bloggers might encourage readers to participate in the blogging community by commenting on blog posts in attempt to increase readership and the success of their blog.

Relating to the blogs’ focus on educating readers, blog posts commonly read as “how-to” guides. Specifically, several of the blog posts I examined had a similar aesthetic style to magazine articles, offering step-by-step guides for readers to engage in activism. For example, *Tolly Dolly Posh Fashion* posted “How to make everyone understand fast-fashion,” *Acteevism* shared “How to make back-to-school season sustainable,” *Faces of Feminism* wrote about “Easy ways to get involved in activism” and *Life of a Blind Girl* detailed “10 ways to make your blog accessible for people with a visual impairment.” The use of numbered steps and coloured font to differentiate quick facts from longer explanations made these posts easy to digest, quick to read and provided concrete ways for readers to make changes. Although the same information could have been presented in a long-form paragraph blog post, the use of numbered lists, distinguishable steps, and vibrant font colours co-produce both an aesthetically pleasing blog post and work to make activism accessible to readers. The popularity of “how-to” posts came up in my conversation with Megan who argued that in order for these posts to resonate with readers, bloggers need to develop trust with their followers. Megan thought that such trust could be built by posting different types of content on various social media platforms to show her followers that she is engaging in the suggested approaches to activism she encourages on her blog. She

argued that posting various types of content (e.g. Instagram photos, YouTube videos) in multiple spaces was a way to give her followers diverse content that they expect of social media influencers, and also works to build an online brand and self-presentation as an activist.

In sum, I have outlined how activism is mobilized on young women's blogs, including how various materialities shape the format and style of blog posts, how bloggers relate social and political issues to their lives and prompt readers to act, and how the "how-to" and "call to action" style of blog posts is entangled in constructions of a trustworthy blogger. In the following subtheme, I will add to and deepen the conversation around the construction of activism, specifically the promotion of individualized activism and rarer moments of broader systemic critique.

Subtheme: Representations of Activism

Activism was represented on the blogs in two ways, as individualized action and broader systemic critique. Activism was constructed as something achievable through individual action, including making ethical and sustainable choices, consumption, fashion, making small changes in everyday life, donating to charity and calling representatives. These individualized actions were most frequently evident in the "call to action" sections of the blogs posts, or were more covertly embedded in blog posts about ethical and sustainable products. Although each of the bloggers frequently encouraged readers to do something at the end of each blog post, individualized, consumer-based activism was at the centre of the blogs *Tolly Dolly Posh Fashion* and *Acteevism*, for instance. On these blogs, activism was something that could be done through consumption, only if the buyer was an ethical consumer who made the "right choice" by purchasing a sustainable consumer good that was produced equitably. More rare moments of

broader systemic critique tended to focus on the fashion industry and consumerism, lack of representation of disability in fashion and the commodification of feminism.

In one example of consumer-based activism, the blog post “Ac(tee)visim: In the wake of Kavanaugh’s confirmation” on the blog *Acteevism*, lists numerous ethical and sustainable brands that have political and/or activist t-shirts. The blogger positions buying t-shirts from these brands as a way to share your political and activist voice, especially “if you are simply too young to vote and still want to be a part of the conversation” (Acteevism, 2018, October 6). Each brand is represented with an image from their website with a model wearing one of their t-shirts. The blogger writes what she likes about each of these brands and how the company is engaging in ethical and sustainable practices. She justifies her inclusion of the brands in her post, writing that the brands “donate a portion of their proceeds to organizations that [she] believes in and trusts[s]” (Acteevism, 2018, October 6). The blog post contains hyperlinks to the brands’ websites. In this example, specific t-shirts are enmeshed in the blogger’s meanings of activism. Using technology to hyperlink various ethical and sustainable brands with activist t-shirts also creates a blog space that constructs activists as having a certain look or body clothed in ethically and sustainably made clothes and also works to distinguish activists (i.e. those who wear t-shirts with activist slogans) from non-activists. Like Pomeranz and Raby’s (2018) discussion of how the smart girl subjectivity is created through material-body-place assemblages, in this blog post, an activist subjectivity is part of an entanglement of materialities-body-time-discourse that co-produces meanings of activism and activists. Specifically, individuals who wear activist-shirts at the time of the Kavanaugh hearing are constructed as activists mobilizing activism through ethical consumption. In this blog post, as well as others on *Acteevism* and *Tolly Dolly Posh Fashion*, it is clear that clothes have power in the bloggers’ activist and blogger subjectivities.

Relating to my earlier discussion of neoliberal activist (influencer) subjectivities and seeing blogs as entrepreneurial through the creation of sponsored blog content and the use of affiliate links, the aforementioned blog post about the activist t-shirts contains a disclosure at the bottom noting that the blogger makes a small commission when the readers use the hyperlinks to purchase the mentioned activist t-shirts. While I do not wish to suggest this form of profit is problematic, as it is a way for the blogger to offset some of the costs of maintaining her blog, I want to emphasize how the individualized, consumer-based approach to activism represented on the blog reflects influencer culture wherein individuals receive commission for promoting products. However, in contrast to ordinary influencers who promote products that might not be ethically and sustainably made or contain activist slogans, sharing activist-oriented gear works to distinguish the blogger as an activist influencer, highlighting the complexity of navigating activist and influencer subjectivities online. It is also important to consider how the promotion of individualized consumer-based approaches to activism and activist subjectivities constructs activism as something that requires money, especially as ethical and sustainable brands tend to be expensive. Despite dedicating most of her blog to consumer-based approaches to activism, Megan offered a critique of consumer-based activism, noting that “not everybody has choices about what they can and cannot buy...”

While I want to emphasize the importance of considering how individualized, consumer-based approaches to activism has implications for defining what counts as activism and who is able to participate, I also want to suggest that such framing of activism might also reflect a sense of hopelessness and anxiety about the possibilities of institutionalized, systemic change. For example, in her discussion of activism, Megan argued that activism involves action, which can include individual action. Megan said:

...like action doesn't have to be political action (okay), like it doesn't have to be related to laws or regulations, it can be related to individual action also... that is something I try to talk about a lot, uhm, especially with the environmental movement at this point, not much is going to happen in the US in terms of regulation...so we need individuals to be doing something about it...

Therefore, the positioning of activism as individualized and even consumer-based might not represent a lack of nuanced thinking about the role of institutions and systems in social justice. Rather, such an approach might actually reflect an anxiety around social change, a sense of culpability and an urgent desire to do something individually.

Despite the prominence of fashion in most of these blogs, three of the blog posts that I analyzed offered broader critiques of fashion as a system. In one example, a post titled "The intersections of fashion and politics" on *Shine Theory*, engages with discourses of postfeminist girl power, neoliberal consumer-based activism and discusses the potentials and pitfalls of political and/or feminist apparel (Shine Theory, 2019, October 14). She also explains how there is a commodification of activist apparel, especially the use of girl power feminism in graphic t-shirts, and argues that "most of these mainstream and commercial stores don't have a great reputation when it comes to labour...by wearing these clothes is hypocritical and promotes a wrong idea of feminism..." While recognizing the potential of activist t-shirts, she offers a critique of girl-power rhetoric, the commodification of feminism and unjust manufacturing and labour practices.

In another example on *Life of a Blind Girl*, the fashion industry was critiqued for a lack of meaningful representation of individuals with disability, as well as for being ableist and hard to navigate as an individual with sight loss. In the post "Disability and fashion" the blogger

writes about her interests in fashion, challenges the assumption that individuals who are blind cannot be passionate about fashion, and reflects on the barriers around fashion including the difficulty navigating online shopping and shopping malls as someone with visual impairments (Life of a Blind Girl, 2018, March 30). This blog posts urges readers to think about the fashion industry as a system and consider how access to and experiences with this system are shaped by disability.

The final example of a broader systemic critique in my analysis of the young women's blogs occurred in a post on *Tolly Dolly Posh Fashion*. In the post titled, "How we can make everyone understand fast-fashion," the blogger explains what fast fashion is and why/how everyone should understand it and its effects (Tolly Dolly Posh Fashion, 2017, June 29). She argues that a way to get people to understand fast fashion is to distinguish clothes (individual) from fashion (system). She explains "if we start to separate the two terms, clothes and fashion into separate entities, then we're more likely to get just about anybody on board in some shape or form." She concludes by noting that "...the industry is important to understand but perhaps it's not vital when trying to get people to start questioning their choices." This post offers poignant commentary on individual choice, action and systemic issues, and how we might get folks to understand how they are connected.

Taken together, these examples highlight that the young women in my sample engaged in critical discussions on their blogs and offered broader systemic critiques. These examples showcase how young women's blogs offer space to think through more complicated political and social issues, challenging framings of their blogs as silly and trivial, a point I discuss later in this chapter. Despite the moments of broader institutionalized systemic critique, however, it seems as though they were unable to see how to respond to these issues except through a micro,

individualized approach to activism, including individual consumption. Or, perhaps as shared by Megan, the rarity of broader system-based approaches to activism on their blogs might reflect a feeling of hopelessness about the feasibility of institutional change.

Subtheme: Defining Activism and Activist Subjectivities

So far, my discussion within this theme of the mobilization of activism has been around the bloggers' constructions and presentations of activism in both individualized and systemic ways, and the ways that the bloggers' meanings of activism are connected to materialities-bodies-spaces-time. I now turn to focus more explicitly on broader definitions of activism, including how the bloggers define activism, how they reflect on discourses of activism including those that construct online work as slacktivist, their thoughts on blogging spaces as activist spaces and whether they self-identify as activists. I draw primarily on my interviews and aim to highlight how the bloggers' meanings and understandings of activism and activist subjectivities are shifting, sometimes contradictory and co-produced within specific material-discursive contexts.

As mentioned earlier, the bloggers tended to connect activism to education, individual action, choice and consumption in blog posts. During the interviews, it was clear that their understandings of activism were broader than the construction of activism on their blogs. The bloggers all challenged a singular, limiting construction of activism, and some of them explained the importance of considering privilege and accessibility in conversations about activism. In one example, Sama told me:

...activism is actively working towards raising the voices of the people who don't have a voice through any means. I love how subjective it is because anyone can do it and can

practice it through many ways, but for me it's by using your skill sets and privileges for the betterment of society. I'm good at writing and making collages, at least I think so, so I made a blog that centered around raising awareness to various issues through the medium that I know best. It's all about playing to your strengths so that everyone can be an activist because everyone has some type of talent or skill.

Sama's comments suggest an individual responsibility to fight for what is "right" and use your power and privilege to create change. In her research on youth's involvement in global justice movements, Kennelly (2014) argues that activism is gendered, wherein girls' and young women's involvement in activism tends to stem from feelings of individual responsibility, culpability and guilt, whereas men are more likely to be involved in activist work to meet and connect with people. Sama's positioning as activism as something "anyone can do" in various ways signals an individual responsibility to harness your skills to do something. Although Sama suggests that "everyone can be an activist," I wonder if her comments are also reflective of a neoliberal girl power narrative that frames girls and young women as equipped, empowered and accountable to use their skills to create change, especially through technology (e.g. Herrero-Diz & Ramos-Serrano, 2018; Keller, 2016).

Megan shared similar thoughts, arguing that "at a high-level, activism is fighting for what's important to you, and fighting for what you think is right ...Uhm, and that can manifest in a lot of different ways." Megan's broad and inclusive definition of activism as "fighting for what's important" comes after a shift in her thinking about privilege and the accessibility of activism. Megan said:

I used to think that it was just like showing up at protests or boycotting things in stores, or uhm, you know, things like that but kind of alongside as I have been thinking more

about my privilege, not everybody can go to a protest...not everybody has choices about what they can and cannot buy, so I think it can manifest in a lot of different ways. It can be having conversations with people about these touchy subjects to get a larger conversation started, I think even that's activism, just getting more people to talk about issues (mhmm). Or calling your representatives...registering to vote, or just working on yourself and your actions, I think activism can really be a lot of different things but at the core ... it's fighting for what you think is right and important.

In this example, Megan challenges a singular understanding of activism and also recognizes the importance of considering the accessibility of various forms of activism. Megan's comments also show how her understandings of activism are produced in specific material-discursive contexts, which Barad (2007) argues works to reconfigure time and space as components in the intra-activity of meaning-making. Like Sama, Megan also comments on self-improvement and individual action as a means to engage in activism.

The importance of material-discursive contexts in meaning-making were most evident in Tolly's understanding of activism. Tolly said:

It means using your voice and committing to advocating for a cause. I don't think it means being perfect, for example, in the eco space, to be an activist I don't think you have to live off the grid, grow your own vegetables, make your own clothes and never use the internet, but I think it means showing up in the spaces that you're needed and also using the privileges you have to help and work with others.

In this example, Tolly, like Sama and Megan, adopts a broad and inclusive framing of activism. She draws on the discourses of an environmental activist as an off-the-grid, self-sustaining

individual, to challenge the positioning of activism as something that needs to be extreme or perfect, which might be an attempt challenge an exceptionalism discourse around activism that has implications for positioning youth activists as distinguished from “ordinary” young people (e.g. Taft, 2011). Tolly’s meanings of activism are created within an entanglement of space-materialities-discourses. She highlights how spaces (“eco space”), materialities (e.g. vegetables, clothes, house, internet) and discourses (e.g. around environmental activism) co-constitute her meanings of activism and an activist subjectivity. The specificity of the entanglement is integral in Tolly’s meaning-making of activism, as the meanings of matter, discourses and spaces she outlines do not exist prior to the intra-action that co-produces their meanings (Barad, 2007).

Given the intense focus on individualized approaches to activism on the blogs I analyzed, it was comforting to see a discussion of the emotional labour of activism and the necessity of cultivating communities of care for activism on *Tolly Dolly Posh Fashion*. In the blog post titled “There is power in feeling hopeless in the face of a climate emergency,” the blogger writes about some of her concerns about the emotional labour and intensity of being an activist (Tolly Dolly Posh Fashion, 2019, July 2). She engages with narratives around growing up in this post as they relate to the climate emergency. For example, she explains that she is not thinking about her career, her hopes and her dreams which she used to obsess over in the past; instead she is overwhelmed with thinking about the future of the planet. This blog post is powerful, urging readers to reflect on the emotional toll of activism. At the end of the blog post, the blogger emphasizes the importance of self-care for activists, especially if they want to be able to make long-term commitments to activism. She writes “if you are in need of support when it comes to eco-anxiety, activism and anything else related to this topic, there are wellbeing resources available from Extinction Rebellion, as well as XR Coaching and the Good Samaritans

Crisis Helpline.” Although the bloggers’ understandings of activism seemed to be focused on individual action, this blog post illustrates that activist bloggers are embedded in community which might also work to push back against the focus on an individualized, empowered girl activist. This blog post also emphasizes the sometimes isolating and overwhelming sense of individual responsibility to engage in activism, which Kennelly (2014) argues disproportionately burdens women. The blogger’s call for discussions of self-care and communities of support alongside conversations of activism echo Kennelly’s (2014) reflections on the need for activist communities of care. I wonder if blogging, the blogging space and reading blogs might be a form of self-care for activists and activist bloggers?

In addition to asking the bloggers about the meanings of activism during their interviews, I asked them to reflect on discourses of activism, including those that construct online activism as a slack form of activism, as well as narratives that frame young people’s activism as uncritical and simply a part of teenage rebellion. While Megan and Tolly shared more complicated feelings, concerns and critiques around such discourses, Sama was quick to critique framings of online activism as slacktivist or clicktivist. Sama argued that she thought such framings of activism “...were part of the narrative made by men who are secretly threatened by the influence that our generation has on the power dynamic in Western society.” Here, Sama challenges the dominance of masculinity in the creation of narratives and in decision making, arguing that dismissive narratives of online activism result from a fear in the power of young people to shift narratives, especially online and in “Western” contexts. In this example, Sama’s critique of constructions of online activism as slacktivist and clicktivist are inseparable from her positionings of young people as capable of creating change, especially in “Western” society, technology and social media as powerful tools, and her understanding of power and influence.

When I asked Tolly what she thought of discourses of online activism as slacktivism or clicktivism, as well as framings of young people's activism as uncritical she said:

I do believe in 'clicktivism'; in the sustainable space, it's on the same line as greenwashing, in my opinion. Of course, not everybody is able to get out and take part in direct-action but if you are labelling yourself as an activist and using your platforms to advocate for a certain issue, I think you have to do more than just share petitions. I don't see criticisms of youth activism being rebellious and ineffective as destructive to the movement because I think that would happen no matter what. I think young people coming together in such an impactful way is scary to some people because they know what standards they're going to be held accountable to.

Tolly's comments highlight how various material-discursive contexts shift whether or not social media is used as an activist platform or whether those using social media are engaging in clicktivism or slacktivism. She argues that self-identifying as an activist online requires an individual to use technology in a certain way, to build a platform and community, and to use said platform to do more than just share petitions. Similarly, Megan said, "there's definitely a way to go about using a social media platform as an activist platform, and actually inspiring people to take action." According to Tolly and Megan, activists need to be mobilizing online in a certain way, and that different ways of using technology are seen as more legitimate than others. I see these comments connecting to my earlier discussions of the expectations of activist bloggers, including branding the self and blogs, as well as constructions and expectations of activist influencers related to using their online platform to build communities that encourage activism.

I also asked the bloggers whether they saw blogging spaces as effective spaces for young people to mobilize their activism. Both Megan and Tolly thought that they were helpful for

finding and cultivating a community and mobilizing activism, however they also thought that blogging spaces should not be the only place to mobilize activism. I was surprised by how their comments reproduced, but also pushed back against, binary approaches to activism. For example, Megan told me that she saw power and potential in the community component of social media, including how it can get folks involved in activism who might not have been otherwise interested, and engage folks in grassroots movements across geographical barriers, reflecting arguments made by Tupper (2014). However, Megan also argued that engaging in an online activist community, although rewarding, should be accompanied by action. Megan said:

...there has to be some kind of a real-life interaction to really do an activist act...and that can be done through your phone, like you can call your representative, or you know, email a letter to somebody important at a company or something like that but...I think the social media spaces act more as like a community building, information sharing (mhmm) network that kind of inspires people to go out and do things.

In this example, Megan makes a curious distinction between social media, blogging communities and “real-life interactions.” At first, Megan seems to suggest that it might not be possible to engage in what she calls “activist act” using technology, which would seemingly reproduce an assumption that “real” activism occurs offline. But then Megan notes that you can do what she considers “activist acts” using technology. As I have argued earlier in my discussion of the intra-activity of activist blogging, an online/offline approach to activism is inherently problematic because it fails to account for the ways that the young women’s activist blogging seeps into all that they do, follows them across space and time, literally when they carry their notebook and laptops with them in case they are inspired, and figuratively when they cannot stop thinking about creating new content. In some ways, Megan’s thoughts on the effectiveness of blogging

spaces for activism might be reflective of her own hesitancy to acknowledge her online work as a legitimate form of activism, be an example of her undermining her own involvement in activist blogging, or an attempt to distinguish herself from other online activists dismissed as clicktivists.

The bloggers that I interviewed also commented on whether they saw their blog as an activist space. Sama told me that she saw her blog as an activist space because it was one of the main ways that she engaged in activism and mobilized her activist beliefs. Sama shared:

Even though [my blog] may not reach every person's screen in the world, I may still affect one person and that's enough for me because change is a domino effect. It just starts with one person to set off a movement and I want to be a part of that in any way I can.

In contrast, Tolly saw her blogging as just one part of her activism, which may reflect her earlier comments around “clicktivism” and her belief that a self-identified activist needs to be engaging in specific ways online and offline, or even some hesitation about the impact of online forms of activism (Ekström & Sveningsson, 2019; Fullam, 2017; Vromen, Xenos, & Loader, 2015). Tolly said “since starting to participate in more direct forms of activism, peaceful protest, for example, I think my blog is an additional element that supports everything else that I do.” It seems as though Tolly sees her blog as an extension and reflection of the other ways she mobilizes her activism. In this comment, she makes an interesting distinction between “direct” forms of activism, including engaging in protest, and her blogging, or and other online forms of activism as “indirect.” This distinction between direct/indirect forms of activism illustrates how her meanings of activist blogging and forms of activism are connected to spaces as well as narratives around what activism looks like, and the perceived importance and effectiveness of various forms of activism.

Megan's reflections around whether she saw her blogging as activism and her blog as an activist space were more complicated than Tolly's and Sama's. While talking to Megan, I noticed that her understandings of activism and her thoughts about her blogging seemed to change during the interview. For example, while telling me about what goes into writing a single blog post, she began to think about the amount of time, work and dedication that goes into her blogging which she had previously overlooked. This marked a change in the interview and she seemed more comfortable seeing her blogging as activism because of the work it involves. She had a similar revelation when talking about what activism means to her. As mentioned earlier, Megan categorized activism broadly, suggesting that it involves advocating for what is important to you, mostly through individualized action. When I asked her if she saw her blog as an activist space and her blogging as activism, Megan said:

Oh, those are interesting questions. I definitely think now more than before, especially with my kind of new rebranding and like solidified new direction that my blog is an activist space. Uhm, but I have never thought of writing blog posts as activism...but now that I think about it, like yeah, [laughs], it probably is. Just having those conversations and informing people and giving people the tools to go and do things to make a difference is activism, (mhmm) and it's inspir[ing], enabling people to be activists themselves (right), yeah. But it's still that, like that uncomfortableness - that space that you feel like "is this activism? or is it not or?" I also think women in general tend to downplay what they do [laughs], and so I am trying not to do that (right), uhm, yeah.

In this example, the blogging space, the blog's name and brand, and her personal brand as an online activist reconfigure Megan's meanings and boundaries of activism and activist spaces. Relating to my earlier discussion of branding, again, Megan emphasizes the importance of the

brand of her blog, including her newly adopted blog name and logo in her willingness to see her blog as an activist space. Megan's brand, logo and blog name "work in a choreography of materialities...as a border and boundary" to distinguish her activist blog from other non-activist blogs (Taylor, 2013, p. 699). She also points to the inclination for women to downplay their contributions as part of emphasized femininity, something which Taft (2017) also talks about in her research with girls about becoming activists. In this example, gender is a part of the intra-activity that co-constitutes Megan's meanings and boundaries of activism, activists and activist spaces. Gendered discourses become materialized in this example in the way she talks about her blog.

In addition to reflecting on their blogs as activism, the bloggers talked about themselves as being or becoming activists. Three of five bloggers labelled themselves as an activist on their blogs, however each of the bloggers had different meanings about what makes someone an activist, and whether or not they were able and willing to call themselves an activist. For example, when asked if she self-identifies as an activist, Tolly said:

I do but this mainly came out of being identified as an 'influencer' by other people and I really don't like that term, especially as it has such a strong connection to consumerism. I don't want to be an influencer in that sense.

Here, she seems confident self-identifying as an activist as a way to distance herself from other non-activist influencers who have followings on social media. Relating to earlier discussions, this comment illustrates the connection and tension between activist and influencer subjectivities. When I asked Sama if she self-identifies as an activist she responded "you know, I try to be" and shared that she posts frequently about social and political issues on her social media accounts. As a result, Sama said "people at school know me as the "political" one or the "feminist." Which

I'm fine with, to be honest." Although Sama writes about many things on her blog, including, feminism, being a Muslim girl in America, democracy and abortion rights, Sama told me that she is "also trying to keep the content lighthearted to show that girls are multifaceted and have more interests than what meets the eye." This comment reflects Taft's (2017) work on the ways that teenage girl activists navigate expectations of popular femininity and their activist subjectivities, as well as Keller's (2016) work on bloggers navigating feminist activism. As discussed in my literature review, femininity and activism are often seen in conflict with each other, complicating young women's experiences with activism and self-identification as activists. On her blog, Sama is critical of the passive components of emphasized/popular femininity such as being afraid to be seen as "political," but by seeking to keep some of the content "lighthearted" she might also be trying to hold on to some of the aspects of popular femininity, by discussing things like growing up, high school and popular culture.

Megan also spoke about push-back for overtly self-identifying as an activist and explained how she worries about how others will respond to her shift to self-identifying as an activist. Megan said:

So talking about sustainability and activism through fashion, like that is activism (right), it's just taking me time to like feel confident saying that. Uhm, I don't really know why, I don't think I would experience anybody that's like "that's not activism" or I don't think I would have trouble like responding to a comment like that. But yeah, I am starting to call myself an activist [laughs].

In each of these examples, the young women's willingness to self-identify as an activist is open, dynamic and entangled with various meanings around activism, stereotypes and constructions of activists, expectations of influencers and bloggers, as well as their own identities, and how these

things are open, dynamic and entangled. Taken together, the young women's comments signal a resistance or reluctance to see themselves as activists, even though their blogging fits within their definitions of activism. Their comments echo reflections made by teenage girls in Taft's (2017) research, who also argue that despite their intense involvement in activism they see themselves as becoming rather than being activists. Like Taft (2017), I argue that this might be reflective of the construction of an activist as a revered subjectivity reserved for a small group of 'exceptional' people.

A narrative of becoming an activist or continuously striving to do better as an activist was also evident in two of the blog posts I analyzed. In the blog post titled "It's taken me over 3 years to become a conscious consumer | my ethical journey" on *Tolly Dolly Posh Fashion*, the blogger outlines her transition and journey from fast fashion to ethical consumption throughout 2013-2017 (Tolly Dolly Posh Fashion, 2017, December 16). Using a digitally illustrated timeline and polaroid photographs, she highlights how she had an 'aha' moment after watching the documentary "The True Cost" and reading about the "Rana Plaza Disaster" (garment factory collapse) in April 2013, which inspired her to make individual changes. In this blog post, she emphasizes that she is not a "perfect" conscious consumer because although she does not buy fast fashion, she does not pay as close attention to the fabrics that her clothes are made of as she would like. Moving forward, her goal is to pay closer attention to the fabrics in the clothes she buys, considering the environmental and personal impacts of the materials, as well as how the fabric shapes the longevity of the product. In this example, materials (clothes, money, news) are part of the intra-activity that produces her meanings and boundaries around her activist subjectivity, a subjectivity that is shifting, dynamic, and co-constituted by many other entanglements of discourses, materialities and time.

A narrative of becoming and continuously striving to do better as an activist was also evident in the “About” section on the blog *Acteevism* (Acteevism, n.d.). In this section of the blog, the blogger explains her approach to activism or what she terms “acteevism,” as “campaigning to bring about social and environmental change through conscious consumerism.” She emphasizes that the goal of the space is progress rather than perfection, and to grow into “acteevism” with the readers. She talks about the evolution of her blog in relation to her shifting subjectivity and values, noting there is a clear shift in her blogs’ content/branding, which occurred “after having [her] own conscious consumer awakening,” reflecting an ethical journey like the one discussed by the other blogger above. The blogger explains that she “sees her consumer dollars as a vote, and chooses to use her voice when she sees a need for change.” She also shares some practical “how-to” tips about being/becoming an “acteevist,” explaining what small changes she has made in her life (e.g. using beeswax wrap on avocados, bringing a tumbler to coffeeshops) during her activist journey. In this example, it is clear that meanings and boundaries of activist subjectivities are not separate from materialities (e.g. beeswax wrap, tumbler) and what they mean (i.e. sustainable choice for environment), where you use them (e.g. kitchen, coffee shop) and also broader discourses of environmentalism (i.e. reducing waste is essential). Barad’s (2007) arguments about the inseparability of materialities and discourses is useful here, as the beeswax wrap and tumbler represent a sustainable choice within discourses of environmentalism and climate change action. As discussed earlier, the blogger might also be trying to make self-identifying as an activist something that is achievable for young people, by highlighting how individual choices and small changes can lead them on an activist journey. Despite the various “how-to” tips for becoming an activist, the emphasis on progress rather than perfection in the blog post works to challenge the framing of activists as revered and perfect. The

focus on becoming rather than being an activist also reflects dominant expectations of a submissive, humble girlhood wherein girls and young women should not see themselves as experts—or activists (Taft, 2017). Taken together, these framings of activism and activist subjectivities highlight that one’s own understanding and embodiment of an activist subjectivity is reconfigured in entanglements of materialities and discourses that mark differences, shifting across time and space, and are intra-actively produced in specific material-discursive contexts.

To summarize, I organized my discussion of the mobilization of activism around three subthemes: activist blogging; representations of activism; and defining activism and activist subjectivities. I considered the implications of the “how-to” blog post format, including how it might be reflective of a common magazine editorial and blogging style, and how it might be a way to make social and political issues accessible and relevant to the readers. I argued that an individualized, consumer-based approach to activism was frequently promoted and encouraged on the blogs, and this has implications for the accessibility of activism, especially for young people. I also discussed rarer examples of broader systemic critique, including the ways that the young women challenged dominant gendered stereotypes and sexism, connected shopping to a broader unjust fashion and economic system, complicated the commodification of feminism and girl power narratives, and critiqued a lack of meaningful disability representation in fashion. Although the bloggers that I spoke with had various connections to activism, there was some ambiguity and uncertainty around whether their blogging was activism and they were an activist. Overall, my discussion in this theme points to the complexity of young women’s activism, and the necessity of considering how material-discursive contexts generate and shape the possibilities for their activism.

Theme Four: Intersectionality and Activist Blogging

The final theme of my analysis focuses on how intersecting social positionings connected to power and marginalization are a part of the intra-activity of activist blogging, shaping young women's access to and experiences with activist blogging. In this section, I organize my writing into two subthemes. I begin by illustrating the need to consider intersectionality as a key component in the intra-activity of activist blogging. In the second subtheme, I center on the ways that narratives around age, generations and growing up came up in my analysis. I focus on how the young women responded to narratives of growing up and blogging, others' perceptions of youth's activist blogging as well as broader constructions of young people's social justice activism.

Subtheme: Intersections

All of the blogs in my sample have blog posts discussing intersectionality, power and privilege. For example, in a blog post titled "The spectrum of vision impairment" on *Life of a Blind Girl*, the blogger complicates a singular definition and narrative of vision impairment by explaining her own experiences as an individual with visual impairment and then presents quotations from various readers and followers about their experiences with visual impairments. In the post, she writes "I wanted to raise awareness of the spectrum of vision impairment, but I knew that this wasn't something I could do on my own" (Life of a Blind Girl, 2018, September 22). In this example, the blogger challenges a singular understanding of visual impairment with the help of her readers and followers. By doing so, the blogger positions herself as a member of her blogging community and challenges the framing of bloggers as the sole content creators providing material for passive readers. In another example, the bloggers on *Faces of Feminism* discuss the importance of intersectionality while discussing period inequity, noting how there is a lack of accessible period products for many menstruating individuals including poor, homeless

and refugee people (Faces of Feminism, n.d.b). Intersectionality, power and privilege were also prominent themes on *Acteevism*, specifically in a blog post titled “I live a low waste lifestyle and I am privileged” (Acteevism, 2018, November 26). In this post, the blogger argues that supporting ethical and sustainable fashion requires money, limiting accessibility for some. This post was the first of its kind in the blog, signaling a shift in the tone of the content. The blogger notes how class positioning and related access to resources is tied to much of what she promotes as a form “acteevism,” or activism via conscious consumerism such as ethically made “tee” shirts. These two examples offer a glimpse into the types of critical conversations that young people engage in within online activist blogging communities (Reitsamer & Zobl, 2014) and highlight the importance of intersections of social positioning within the intra-activity of meaning-making.

In my conversations with the bloggers, I asked them if they saw their subjectivities as well as their self-identification in terms of gender, sexuality, age, class and race, as something that shaped what they blog about, their approach to activism as well as their experiences as a blogger. The young women all felt that their subjectivities and lived experiences shaped the way that they experience blogging, reflecting arguments made by Gabriel (2016) and Hill (2017). For example, Tolly, who self-identified as white and British said “I understand that I have likely had success due to having a certain level of white-privilege and not being targeted by racism.” Tolly argues that her white privilege has helped her be a successful blogger, asserting that race shapes the way that readers respond to blogs and bloggers. Connecting to earlier discussions of neoliberal activist influencers, such white privilege likely constructs Tolly as an idealized blogger, making her an appealing candidate for brand sponsorships and collaborations which would also boost the success of her blog and her status as an activist blogger and influencer.

When asked if she saw her subjectivity as a Muslim, Libyan-American teenaged girl as relevant to her blogging experiences, Sama replied “definitely!” Sama explained:

If I didn’t identify with these communities, I probably wouldn’t be as vocal about the issues that I talk about on my blog. That’s why I feel like it’s so important for me to build a platform where I can discuss my perspective about certain topics that affect me in ways that some people don’t even think twice about. It’s the only way to foster a peaceful and empathetic society....

She shared that her interests in the intersections of fashion and politics, as well being a Muslim girl shape her approach to activism. Sama told me that she wears a hijab or a headscarf, and she talks about this on her blog because, as she explained “wearing the hijab was what lead me to my passion for women’s rights and politics and such.”

Sama also reflected on how discussing feminism and religion on her blog posed some challenges for her and sometimes resulted in receiving negative comments from readers. Sama shared that when she first started blogging, she received some negative comments from readers who argued that “...Islam would promote the oppression of women and stuff like that.” Sama told me that these comments on her blog, although rare, made her feel like she needed to respond to them. Sama said:

I remember feeling obligated to respond to them because I was the representative of my religion in a way through my blog, so I would spend so much time researching religious evidence to support my claim that the commenters were wrong, until I was like “I’m literally not a religious leader, why am I wasting so much time trying to act like I know everything about this.” Like even though I know the stuff these people are saying are

wrong, I don't know which verse in the Quran I can cite to defend that, so I stopped responding all together...

Tolly and Sama's comments illustrate how social factors such as race and religion are a part of intra-activity of blogging, shaping what they blog about, how they experience blogging and success, as well as how others respond to and engage with their blog.

Megan also spoke about the relevancy of her privilege in her blogging as well as her approach to activism. Megan shared how she has recently started to reflect more on her privilege, which she thought was necessary because of the environmental activism she discusses on her blog. Megan said:

as a straight, white, fairly wealthy woman, I feel like it's important for me to talk about that in addition to whatever topics I'm talking about because it does really impact the way that I have experienced the world and things like that, uhm, so yeah. I don't think it has always been a part of my blog, but more recently my identity and kind of the way that I have experienced the world has become a lot more important to, the, that narrative.

Megan's self-identification and privilege shape the perspectives she shares on her blog, and also her broader approaches to activism. Gender, race and class are all key components of the intra-activity of Megan's activist blogging, which works to challenge a humanist framing of blogs as materialities disconnected from their bloggers, as they are mutually co-constituting.

Intersections of privilege and marginalization also influence the ways that online activist communities are formed and experienced. For example, although online spaces tended to be constructed by the bloggers in my sample as utopic spaces that allow young people to network, build activist communities and educate one another, the blogger of *Life of a Blind Girl* writes at-

length about the lack of accessibility of online spaces for many folks who are blind or experience sight loss. In a post titled “10 ways to make your blog accessible for people with a visual impairment,” she offers a step-by-step guide for other bloggers to make their blogs more accessible (Life of a Blind Girl, 2018, September 19). The blogger emphasizes the importance of using technology, including closed captions, labels and alternate texts to make navigating a blog page possible for someone with vision loss. She explains how the accessibility of blogs shapes who she follows and what blogs she frequents, arguing that if a blog is both interesting and accessible, she happily follows the blog and the blogger across social media platforms. Like Hill (2017), I argue that there is a need for more qualitative research centered on bloggers with disabilities, and the technological affordances that help and hinder online peer-to-peer education and activist community building.

Two of the young women I spoke to reflected on whether activist blogging spaces were gendered. Sama thought that blogging was something that both boys and girls did, but she argued that gender shapes the content of a blog. She saw fashion blogs as mostly run by women and girls and thought that her blog and its content were most relevant to women. Sama’s comments reproduce a dominant association between girls and young women as interested in fashion, reflecting other researchers’ arguments that narratives of popular girlhood tend to reinforce fashion and lifestyle content as “normative” for girls and young women to blog about (Dejmanee, 2018; Hill, 2017; Horton, 2018). In another example, Megan was quick to tell me that she thought online activist spaces were gendered, which she saw as “unfortunate.” For instance, she told me about a young woman she follows on YouTube, who had a video about gender and environmental activism where she argued that conversations about veganism and

environmentalism are only happening between women. Megan agreed that she tends to talk about environmentalism most with other girls and women. Megan also said:

although I do think it is important for women to have kind of their own space...I think there is room for more people, but I do think it feels, like that community aspect is a little bit quicker built when it is mostly women.

Megan did not elaborate on why she thought community was easier to build among women, however, her arguments do beg the question of what specific material-discursive contexts make community building in activist blogging spaces easier among girls and young women. Overall, my discussion in this subtheme illustrate the ways that intersecting social factors of privilege and marginalization including race, class, religion, gender and disability are key components in the intra-activity of activist blogging.

Subtheme: Growing Up and Activist Blogging

Many of the blogs in my sample have a welcome or introductory post on their blog in which the bloggers to introduce themselves and their hopes for the blogging space. Age and growing up are relevant to many of these introductory posts, wherein bloggers position their blogs as something they first started as a creative project and to find and create community as a youth activist. Commonly, this introductory post includes a bit of a background story around why they have decided to create the blog. For example, in the “About me” post on *Life of a Blind Girl*, the blogger explains that the aim of her blog is “to help others that are blind/visually impaired and give my opinions and experiences on things relating to sight loss and just general life” (Life of a Blind Girl, n.d.). She positions her blog as a community space, as well as a space for her to reflect on her lived experiences. On *Shine Theory*, a post titled “A welcome post and a

call to action” positions the blog as a space for conversations around injustice and invites people to join the community if they are willing to participate in these conversations (Shine Theory, 2017, December 18). Similarly, the *Shine Theory* blogger started her blog in order to carve a space for herself on the internet, cultivate a community and to have an outlet to share things that matter to her. As discussed earlier, the young women told me that blogging spaces were useful in developing a community of young activists, which might not always be accessible to young people in their local communities, echoing arguments made by young people elsewhere (e.g. Garcia & Vemuri, 2017; Jackson, 2018; Keller, 2016). I wonder if some of the appeal of mobilizing activism online might be the ways that online spaces and technologies offer different opportunities for community, to create, and to engage with activism differently than offline. That is, does activist blogging, specifically the continual process of writing, creating pieces of art, posting them for an audience and engaging with others in the comment sections provide a different kind of affective engagement than engaging in activist communities in other contexts?

During my analysis of the blogs I noticed that *Acteevism* and *Tolly Dolly Posh Fashion* had a clear shift in content and aim over time, including transitioning towards more overtly political and activist content. Both blogs started as fashion blogs when they bloggers were in their pre-teenage years, with many of their earliest posts adopting a more traditional fashion blog style where they posted “look books” or outfit ideas for readers. However, as they grew up with their blogs, the content shifted towards overtly discussing environmentalism, sustainability, conscious consumerism and the importance of resisting fast fashion. Further, while I was in the process of analyzing *Shine Theory*, the blogger posted that they had just started a self-hosted website and were in the midst of transitioning their Tumblr blog to that platform. I was struck by how these changes mark and archive a shift in the bloggers’ activist subjectivities. The blog as a

material archive offers insight into the meanings and boundaries that the bloggers navigate and negotiate in relation to growing up, activism and their activist subjectivities.

I spoke at-length with Megan about the growth and shifts in her blog. Megan said that she was motivated to change the content on her blog after taking an environmental studies class at university, a course she reluctantly and unenthusiastically enrolled in because it was the only course that would fit in her schedule to fill the required education course she needed for her degree. Meanwhile an assignment in another course involved writing about the industry you wanted to work in alongside issues of sustainability. Her professor in this latter course introduced her to the “True Cost” documentary, and this, alongside her introduction to environmental studies, encouraged her to re-evaluate the content on her blog. However, Megan shared that the shift in the content of her blog took time and a lot of thought:

So it changed my mindset, but it didn't immediately change what I was talking about on my blog (right). It took me a good seven or eight months to actually start talking about that on my blog. Uhm, just because I had to grapple with it myself, like internally, before I really decided how I could move forward, or whether I ethically could still promote buying all of this fashion (right) uhm, yeah, so that's what really sparked it initially and then I became really frustrated with like the lack of other resources uhm, there aren't many sustainability class at Beach University and I didn't have time as a full-time student to be reading all of these books (mhmm) and watching documentaries all the time so uhm, that kind of like anger or frustration got me really sparked to like start doing some other things.

She continued to explain that while it felt risky to make this shift in content on her blog, it felt more legitimate and meaningful to discuss environmentalism and sustainability, instead of just

fashion which “could just be seen [pauses] as not as important [laughs]... something that a lot of people already do.” As evident in this example, the evolution of Megan’s blog is entangled in shifting material-discursive contexts, including a dissonance between her learning in her courses, growing up, the content of her blog, the brand she has co-produced across social media platforms, her feelings of individual responsibility as a blogger promoting fast-fashion, as well as broader discourses of environmentalism. This example emphasizes the ways that blogs come to mean something to bloggers, how bloggers’ sense of self is enmeshed with the content on their blogs, and how shifts in the blog might also mirror shifts in bloggers’ experiences and perspectives.

The young women I spoke to all saw blogging as something they wanted to continue to do as they grow older. In their comments, they both drew on and pushed back against narratives of growing up. For example, Tolly told me that she continues to blog because she has cultivated a following, enjoys blogging and wants to continue to use her platform to inspire and educate. Tolly inverts the association between success and adulthood, highlighting that as a young person she already feels accomplished. Similarly, Sama said that she has become passionate about blogging, and it is something that she wants to continue to do as she gets older. Unlike Tolly, Sama hoped that her blog continued to grow and evolve as she ages and that its impact deepens. Sama saw possibility in her activist blogging as she ages, which might be related to her focus on becoming more “professional” and “consistent” with her blogging. In contrast, Megan felt worried that growing up and expectations of adulthood might make it more challenging for her to continue blogging. Megan said that her dad had recently asked if she was going to continue blogging once she got a full-time job, and she said she had never thought about stopping blogging because it is something that she has done for so long. Megan’s dad’s comment also

trivializes blogging as something that is “teenage” like writing a diary, as well as a hobby rather than a “full-time job.” Later in the interview, Megan told me that she wanted people, especially older people, to know that her blog is important to her, that she dedicates numerous hours each week to her blog and it is not just a “phase.” These comments illustrate the ways that young people are seen as becoming and liminal rather than being. It is assumed that Megan’s blog is a “hobby” for her to pass the time until she “becomes” a full-time worker. The dismissive framing of young’s lives, including how they spend their time, their interests and their passions as “phases” works to mark being young as simultaneously less critical, important and certain, and being an adult as more certain, stable and attuned to “what matters.”

In addition to speaking about how others perceive their blogs as they grow up, the bloggers also offered critical comments around framings of young people’s activism. Megan and Sama spoke about how they saw age and generation shaping common framings of young people’s activism. In one example, Megan countered framings of young people’ activism as simply teenaged rebelliousness, arguing that “we wouldn’t be fighting or skipping school every Friday or you know like at city hall striking for climate change if it wasn’t something that we were really committed to.” Sama also spoke about the collective power of young people and activists who mobilize their activism online while pushing back against dismissive framings of youth’s activism. Sama said:

We have this new tool on our side that allows us to create a whole movement with the rest of the world without having to know their names. We're bonded through a common ideal and it's enough to call out the corruption in many different fields. With that being said, people greatly underestimate our influence and our capabilities and once we realize

that and get pas[t] the critiques, we'll continue to thrive until we are the ones making the decisions for our communities, states, and country.

In these examples, the young women push back against dismissive framing of young people's social justice activism, arguing that there is a collective drive, critical social awareness and solidarity among young activists. Sama further illustrates the potential for young people to harness their activist power through using technology, especially when they "get pas[t] the critiques."

To conclude, the final theme of my analysis considered the importance of intersectionality as part of the intra-activity of activist blogging. In this theme, I have highlighted how intersections of race, class, age, gender and disability shape young women's meanings and experiences with activist blogging. I discussed how the young women reproduced and pushed back against dominant narratives of growing up while discussing if they will continue to blog as they age. Overall, this section points to the complexity of activist blogging and the need to consider how intersections of privilege and marginalization are an integral part of the intra-activity of activist blogging.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored young women's activist blogging through in-depth analyses of five blogs, and interviews with three of the bloggers. Drawing on Barad's (2007) approach to posthumanism, I have illustrated the need to consider how meanings and boundaries of activism and activist subjectivities are entangled in specific material-discursive contexts, that "things" have material and discursive power and that boundaries and meanings of "things" do not preexist the specificity of entanglements. Four prominent themes emerged in my analysis. First, the process of blogging is intra-actively produced, challenging a binary approach to online and offline activism. Through the young women's narratives, it was clear that materialities, such as laptops, notebooks and journals had force. I also discussed the centrality of digital media art in the young women's blogs, and as a component of the intra-activity of activist blogging. Using Barad (2007), I argued that the multiple components of the young women's blogging process, including the ways that objects (e.g. technologies, notebooks, laptops, desks, beds), discourses of "good" bloggers, where they blog, how they blog and when they blog come together to generate the possibilities for their blogging. The complexity and specificity of the entangled blogging process sometimes also blurred the lines between blogging and not blogging, wherein the bloggers shared that they were always thinking about blogging, felt worried about being a "good," consistent blogger, and carried their notebooks and blogs with them everywhere.

The second theme I unpacked in my analysis was the embodiment of neoliberal activist (influencer) subjectivities. Here, I highlighted the ways that activist bloggers and blogs are embedded in an ethos of neoliberalism including individual success, branding, marketing and self-promotion. I considered how activist blogging and bloggers both reflect and push back against social media influencers. The young women I spoke to felt compelled to self-present

across various social media platforms in certain ways, and collaborate with brands, while also developing trust with their readers as activist bloggers. The bloggers spoke at-length about dominant constructions of “good” bloggers, and that the pressures to achieve these expectations can cause stress and worry. I found myself torn between applauding the time, work and energy that the young women put into their blogs and mobilizing their activism online, while also feeling upset at how the work of blogging and the expectations of activist bloggers reflect broader neoliberal girl power narratives that place overwhelming pressure on “empowered” girls to use their technological skillset to be leaders of social change (e.g. Herrero-Diz & Ramos-Serrano, 2018).

I also discussed the ways that activism was constructed on the blogs, and how the bloggers’ meanings of activism and activist subjectivities were shaped by both materialities and discourses related to social media, technology, gender and age. Although they adopted broad definitions of activism focused on acting on one’s beliefs, they were sometimes hesitant to see their blogging as activism or themselves as activists. Some of the young women felt that their blogging in and of itself was not activism, but was a part of their broader activist work. Interestingly, in their discussions of activism and whether they self-identified as activists they emphasized the importance of an online brand as an activist and a branded activist blog. Some of the bloggers also shared that identifying as an activist and activist blogger was an attempt to distance themselves from other non-activist social media influencers who promote intense consumption, something they saw as problematic.

My final emerging theme was centered on intersectionality and activist blogging. In this theme, I outlined how intersections of power, privilege and marginalization are a part of the intra-activity of activist blogging, shaping young women’s access to and experiences with

activist blogging. For example, the young women all saw intersections as influencing what they blog about, how they have experienced blogging success, what blogs and bloggers they follow and the comments they receive on their blogs. The young women's narratives in the interviews and their blog posts also materialized narratives related to growing up and activism, including the framing of blogs as silly and trivial, and young activists as uncritically rebellious. Overall, my aim in this theme was to illustrate that activist blogging is not universally experienced by young women.

Adopting a Baradian posthuman approach during this project was incredibly useful and challenging. Barad's concepts of entanglements, intra-activity and agential cuts were foundational tools for analyzing the blogs and interview transcripts. This approach encouraged me to think about my ethical responsibilities as a researcher, and how I am part of the meaning-making of this research process. For example, I made agential cuts during this project, including around my data collection and analysis process, which temporarily isolated and untangled the phenomena of activist blogging. Barad (2007) argues that these cuts make differences for the meaning generated within research. Barad's theory influenced my thinking at all stages of this project, beginning with my research questions, my methodological approach, the analysis process I used and the questions I asked myself and the data in analysis. One significant challenge I faced throughout this project was the complexity of writing in a posthuman way. Barad adopts an onto-epistemological approach that does not privilege the material, discursive, human or non-human, and I found myself struggling at times to translate my posthumanist thinking into words that acknowledge the shifting complexity of the phenomena I was describing. Despite the challenge and complexity of adopting a Baradian approach, I see my theoretical framework as a significant strength of my project because it helped me to focus in on

materialities and discourses in a way that is often overlooked. Barad's theorizing has also helped me to rethink young women's activist blogging within a broader reframing of the world as intra-actively becoming wherein "some things come to matter and others are excluded" (Barad, 2007, p. 393). Informed by Barad, my project is unlike other research on girls' and young women's activist blogging.

In addition to the value of drawing specifically on Barad, I argue that my thesis works to address a gap in the literature on young women's online activism around the significance of materiality in their work. My multi-method qualitative approach allowed me to better understand the experiences of activist blogging as well as the meanings young women attach to their blogs and the blogging process. This approach made me feel close to the data that I engaged with, as I did an in-depth analysis of the blogs as an archive or collection of their activism and also talked to some of the bloggers about their own meanings and experiences with activist blogging. I have a small sample of blogs and interviewees in my sample which I see as a strength because my goal is not generalizability. In this project, I aimed to foreground the narratives of the young women by drawing on examples from their blog posts and their narratives in the interview. A larger sample size might have hindered my ability to consistently engage deeply with a posthuman analysis within the confined timeline of completing a thesis.

There are also some limitations of my project. First, although I had some diversity in my sample around the content on the blogs that I analyzed, most of them can be categorized within the realm of fashion and lifestyle blogs. Future research might consider how activism is mobilized on blogs that are more overtly and concretely about activism, outside of the realm of fashion and lifestyle blogs. Further, two of the bloggers that I interviewed had very established online followings across social media platforms. There is room for more research on young

women's activist blogging that considers the experiences of less-established girl bloggers. Alternatively, future research might consider how narratives of celebrity activism or individualized, celebrity "star" activist subjectivities (Bent, 2020) are materialized and constructed in young women's activist blogging. Another weakness of this project is that I was not able to interview all of the bloggers of the blogs that I analyzed.

Overall, my project has illuminated the potential for a posthuman approach to young women's activist blogging to challenge binary approaches to activism and limiting framings of their online work as uncritical and simplistic. Karen Barad's posthuman theory helped me to make meaning of the young women's shifting and complex understandings of activism, activist subjectivities and activist blogging. It became clear that materialities have discursive power and vice versa, and these entanglements matter to the young women because they influence meanings, boundaries and expectations of activist blogging. I argue that these material-discursive entanglements matter because they have effects, including influencing shifting boundaries of activism, activist, blogger and girl activist blogger. The specificity of the material-discursive entanglement must not be overlooked because they co-produce the meanings and boundaries within the intra-action. My findings illustrate the saturation and materialization of neoliberal girl power narratives in young women's activist blogging, as well as the continued relevance of discourses of activism including "slacktivism" and "clicktivism" in the ways that young women mobilize activism online and embody an activist subjectivity. Ultimately, my hope is that my project inspires a rethinking of young women's activist blogging, by challenging the assumed passivity of materials and emphasizing the ways that meaning-making is entangled, shifting and generated in material-discursive contexts.

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Appendix A: Email Script

Hello (name or blogger name),

I think you would be a great ‘fit’ for my MA research project, *Girl Bloggers: Exploring the materiality of young women’s online social justice activism*.

I have attached a more formal letter of invitation on this email, describing my project and important information for you to know as a participant.

Please respond if you are interested in participating by (date).

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration,

Lindsay C. Sheppard

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Appendix B: Interview Guide

Demographic Information:

- Where do you live?
- How old are you?
- How do you identify in terms of race, ethnicity and culture?
- How do you identify in terms of class?
- How do you identify in terms of gender and sexuality?
- Do you see these identity contexts as relevant to your experience as a blogger or to your blogging?

Blog:

- How would you describe your blog and its content to someone who has never seen it?
- When did you start your blog? How old were you?
- Why did you start a blog?
- How did your friends and family respond to your blog when you first created it?
- What challenges did/do you experience with beginning and maintaining your blog?
- What skills are required to develop and maintain a blog?
- How has technology shaped the way that you blog?
- Do you see your blog as a form of art? Why or why not?
- How has art and/or digital media art shaped the way that you blog?
- How does your blog content differ/reflect your content on other social media platforms?
- How has your blog evolved since its inception?
- Why do you continue to blog?
- How do you prepare to blog? (e.g. brainstorm, plan)
- Where do you work on your blog?
- What do you do while you blog?
- How do you respond to the comments on your blog posts?

Activism, Activist Subjectivities & Blogging:

- How do you define activism? What does activism mean and/or look like to you?
- Do you self-identify as an activist? Why or why not?
- Do you consider your blog an activist/activism space?
- How do you respond to critiques around youth's activism and/or online activism? For example, popular narratives that construct youth's activism as rebellious, uncritical and ineffective. Also narratives that construct online forms of activism as illegitimate, 'clicktivism' or 'slacktivism'.
- Do you think blogging spaces are effective spaces for young people to engage in activism?

Blogging Communities:

- Have you made friends through blogging?
- Are blogging spaces effective spaces for developing an online community? How so?

Blogging, Activism & Girlhood:

- Do you see blogging spaces as gendered? Are girls and young women more likely to engage in blogging activities?
- What does your blog say about your identity as a girl, young women, youth, activist and/or blogger?

Appendix C: Blog Post Analysis Guide

General:

- Blog post title (if any) :
- Date posted:
- Reason for selection:
- Is the post an original post or one “re-blogged” from another blog?

Content:

- What is the blog post about?

- What is the overall message conveyed in the blog post?

- Does the blog post engage with discourses around activism, activist identities, growing up, youth or girlhood? If so, which ones and how?

- Does the blog post connect the topic to their personal experiences, or experiences of girls and youth more generally? If so, how?

Format:

- How is the blog post organized? (e.g. long text, mix of text and graphics)
- Does the blog post use images, videos or other graphics? If so, what images, graphics or visual are used? How are they related to the content of the blog post? What do they add to the blog post?
- What colours and font styles are used?

Technology:

- Does the blog post incorporate features of technology such as hashtags or hyperlinks?

Community:

- Does the blog post engage with the readers, or encourage them to engage with the blog post through commenting or “re-blogging”?

-Does the blog post have any comments from readers? If so, how are the readers engaging with the blog post? Overall, do the comments seem to be positive or negative?

-Does the blog post have any “re-blogs” from readers? If so, how many?

-How does the blog post, including the content, format and design reflect (or not) the overall theme of the blog space?

-How does the blog post, including the content, format and design reflect (or not) the online community fostered in the blog space?