Facebooking for Feminism: Social Network Sites as Feminist Learning Spaces

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Abstract

Social media such as Facebook have become a significant space where social interactions increasingly take place. Within these spaces, users construct and engage with information that may facilitate social movements such as feminism. This study explored ways feminists learn, challenge, and reproduce discourses related to gender and feminism through Facebook. This research is positioned within current literature and theory related to gendered contexts of social media engagement and feminist social movement learning. Using qualitative interviews and a digital focus group, I investigated the experiences of 9 women who either learn about or engage with feminism through Facebook. Using critical feminist discourse analysis, I coded and analyzed themes that related to ways feminism is represented, constructed, navigated, and limited through Facebook. Specifically, I considered ways in which feminism can be learned, ways Facebook can be used as a learning platform, and ways gendered power relations can influence feminist engagement online. I advocate for continued exploration of and engagement with feminist uses of Facebook.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Mass media often promote postfeminist sentiments that claim the work of feminism is complete (McRobbie, 2009). However, as social contexts shift, sexism is sustained by gendered power relations (Walby, 2011). Feminism must support social transformation beyond formal education and through everyday acts that challenge and shift power relations (hooks, 2000a). These everyday acts can take place through informal learning in social network sites such as Facebook (English & Irving, 2015). Such learning may support everyday acts of feminism that ignite and sustain social movements.

Framed by post-structural feminism and positioned within online social movement learning and adult education, this research explores the experiences of women who participate in feminist Facebook groups. This research uses feminist discourse analysis to analyze data from open-ended qualitative interviews and a Facebook focus group. In this chapter, I contextualize the proposed research and frame my research problem. I discuss the recent popularity of social network sites, outline my research questions, and detail an overview of this proposed research. Following the overview, I detail my connections to the research topic, discuss my rationale for conducting this research, and outline my proposed timeline.

Context

Since Facebook emerged in 2004, social network sites have become a social phenomenon changing how people interact (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). In June 2019, Facebook saw an average of 1.59 billion daily active users (Facebook, 2019c). Boyd and

Ellison (2007) argue that emergences of Web 2.0 platforms have supported online knowledge construction.

Web 2.0 platforms allow users to both access and construct information online, whereas Web 1.0 platforms only support information dissemination. Social network sites are Web 2.0 platforms which are defined by Boyd and Ellison (2007) as:

> Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (p. 211)

To interact on Facebook, users must create a public or semi-public profile where they choose and display a personal photograph, name, and information (such as age and hometown). A list of connected users is represented through a "friends list" where users must mutually agree to interact with one another through Facebook. Other users can view friends lists and a search engine can be used to find and connect with users.

Social network sites have extended to interconnect with one another; elements of some social network sites can be integrated with others and accessed through multiple forms of technology. For example, users can post pictures through a photo-based social network site such as Instagram and have the same photo appear on a multimodal social network site such as Facebook or text-based social network site such as Twitter. Social network sites are interconnected with digital technologies such as phones and tablets that promote and sustain user interaction (Hirzalla & Van Zoonen, 2011).

Digital and material contexts merge through increased accessibility to social network sites. For example, social network sites are integrated with work email accounts,

location indicators, and face-to-face friendship connections (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). As such, divides between virtual and physical realms become narrowed and with these connections, "Facebook identities [become] clearly real in the sense that they have real consequences for the lives of the individuals who constructed them" (Zhao et al., 2008, p. 1832).

Facebook has been used as a forum to voice personal opinions related to gender issues publicly. Such opinions have implications beyond the digital world. People have lost their jobs or have been disciplined at school because of their online conduct. For example, a Hydro One employee was dismissed from his job after a video of him heckling a female news anchor with "sexually explicit taunts" ("Hydro One Employee Fired," 2015, para. 2) surfaced on social media. This taunt was caught on camera and then posted online where it was rapidly reposted and critiqued by social media users. He was identified as a Hydro One employee and subsequently dismissed from his job. This incident further inspired public discussions regarding moral conduct and gender harassment prevalence in Canada. Similarly, Dalhousie dentistry students were suspended for forming a Facebook gentlemen's club where "the fourth-year male dentistry students' violent sexual comments about female classmates included a poll about having 'hate' sex with female students and drugging women" ("Dalhousie Supends 13 Dentistry Students," 2015, para. 6). In the face of these incidences of sexism, people have used Facebook and social media as a platform for feminist engagement.

Social norms span across both online and offline spaces (Hirzalla & van Zoonen, 2011; Sassen, 2002). While online feminist engagement is documented in news stories and social media initiatives, academic research has yet to explore the online experiences

of feminist activists. Exploring how online engagement influences political action, Amin (2010) worries that shifts towards digital political engagement causes users to focus their participation online without considering offline social change. In doing so, online digital engagement may support false senses of activism rather than effective and meaningful engagement. As such, both Collin (2008) and Amin (2010) agree that digital activists need to consider possible outcomes of their actions. Regardless of whether social media leads to concrete social change, it may play a role for some in learning about social issues such as feminism.

Statement of the Problem

Users of the Internet can rapidly share information across time and distance through Web 2.0 platforms (Cooks & Isgro, 2005). Such sharing practices can expand and diversify information in emancipatory ways. However, dominant and marginalizing norms may also be reproduced (Aarsand, 2008) with implications for gender (Kelly, Pomerantz, & Curry, 2006).

Participation on social network sites is often seen as "frivolous or problematic because of their association with youth and femininity" (Harris, 2008, p. 488). Such perceptions of social network sites may delegitimize informal online learning. Additonally, discourses that frame social network spaces as unsafe and predatory may discourage women from engaging in these spaces (Ybarra, Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2009). Social network sites are often seen as spaces where young women sexually exploit themselves (Moreno, Swanson, Royer, & Roberts, 2011), meet sexual predators (Gannon, 2008), and damage professional reputations (MacDonald, Sohn, & Ellis, 2010; Malesky & Peters, 2012).

Despite concerns for women's safety and professional reputation when interacting on Facebook, research also shows that social network sites serve as informal educational spaces and facilitate socially transformative participation (Collin, 2008; Harris, 2008). In sites such as Facebook, users critique social contexts, contribute to changing discourses, and support alternate gender representations (Cohen & Raymond, 2011; Greenhow, 2010; Harris, 2008; Kehus, Walters, & Shaw, 2010; Kensinger, 2003; Tartoussieh, 2011). Within Web 2.0 spaces, users are not merely passive subjects but also can influence digital social norms (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Puente, 2011; Sassen, 2002). The ability to create within online social spaces can "enable the emergence of new cultures of interaction between cyberspace and the larger social order" (Sassen, 2002, p. 377).

Social networking sites do not exist in isolation; they are embedded within larger webs of social relations. As such, to understand ways social network sites are valued, accessed, and used, it is important to consider context and experiences of the users (Cooks & Isgro, 2005). Gender norms are one of many factors that influence such context and experience.

Facebook offers a space where users can represent themselves, access information, and create knowledge in ways that facilitate empowerment (Jackson, 2007). How users engage with these sites for feminist purposes is unclear, with most studies of gender and Facebook focusing on differences in engagement online (Kuo, Tseng, Tseng, & Lin, 2013; Seidman & Miller, 2013; Thompson & Lougheed, 2012; ul Haq & Chand, 2012). Much research done on the liberatory possibilities of oppositional and critical discourse through digital participatory cultures such as social network sites does not apply a gendered lens (e.g., Burwell, 2010; Byerly, 2005; Cohen & Raymond, 2011;

Collin, 2008; Greenhow, 2010; Grummell, 2010) with a few notable exceptions (e.g.,

Gregg, 2006; Irving & English, 2011; Puente, 2011). Furthermore, research exploring

digital adult education contexts rarely explores the experiences of the users of the spaces

(Harris, 2008). With the possibility of digital spaces being normalizing rather than

transformative spaces, and with widespread digital engagement, it is apparent that more

research on Facebook and feminism is necessary.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this research is to understand the adult education and social

movement learning experiences of women who use Facebook for feminism. I use a

feminist discourse analysis (Lazar, 2005) to explore this objective. In researching women

participating in feminist Facebook groups, I explore the following question: How do

women learn feminism, represent themselves, and enact feminism within Facebook?

Specifically, I explore:

1. How do feminists learn to construct and represent their selves online?

2. What gendered power relations influence users' learning of feminism on
   Facebook?

3. How can Facebook be used as a site for learning and participating in social
   movements such as feminism?

Overview of the Study

Framed by post-structural feminism and positioned within adult education and

online social movement learning, this research explores the experiences of feminists who

learn about and engage with feminism on Facebook. For many post-structural feminists,

gender is considered as socially constructed, defined, and policed in marginalizing ways

that often privilege those who perform normative gender representations and reproduce dominant knowledges (Butler, 1999). Post-structural feminism disrupts language and terminology and encourages dynamic approaches to gender and identity to challenge dominant conceptualizations of gender (Lazar, 2007). Post-structural feminist theory provides a lens to understand how discursive gendered power relations are represented and challenged through digital engagement within Facebook sites.

In this research, I draw from critical Canadian adult education theory (Nesbit, Brigham, Taber, & Gibb, 2013) to frame these groups as a context for informal (Steinklammer, 2012) and social movement (Hall, 2006) learning. Nesbit (2013) defines adult education as "encompassing all the approaches, processes, and activities having to do with the education of, and learning by, adults" (p. 4). Furthermore, adult education in Canada supports critical lenses (Nesbit et al., 2013), transformative learning objectives (Lange, 2013), and increased access to learning for adults (Nesbit et al., 2013), all of which can be supported by social network sites.

I used a feminist discourse analysis (Lazar, 2005) research design that employed a post-structural feminist approach to discourse (Butler, 1999; Haraway, 1991). Data collection took place in three stages: individual initial interviews, focus group discussion, and exit open-ended qualitative interviews. I recruited nine participants using snowball sampling through my Facebook "friends" list, which at the time consisted of approximately 250 friends. Then I sent all "friends" a letter of invitation and all respondents were asked to engage in interviews and focus group conversation. All participants chose at least one of three interview formats: face-to-face, telephone, or video-conference interviews. All nine participants partook in initial interviews, six

participants partook in a digital Facebook focus group, and seven participants partook in exit interviews. I analyzed all data by hand and NVivo to code for themes related to ways of representing gender, advocating for feminism, and learning feminism.

Personal Connections and Positionality

Feminist research calls for researchers to engage in reflexivity that identifies and interrogates positionality. Reflexivity reveals social situatedness within research contexts and ways positionality influences research processes (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2009). My lived experiences are connected with my research as I use Facebook as a space to learn about and advocate for feminism. As a White, non-disabled woman who is part of the Global North, I am afforded unearned privileges associated with my skin (McIntosh, 1989), age, geopolitical location, ability, and religion. My experiences using technology relate to my positionality; lack of access to technology has often further marginalized those with limited access to financial capital that persist on global (Ayanso, Cho, & Lertwachara, 2010) and local (Ricoy, 2013) scales.

I understand Facebook to operate as a space that can support liberatory objectives but can also be used to reinforce and reproduce social norms. As such, I support constructivist perspectives that credit user engagement as the means through which Facebook holds potential to facilitate feminist objectives. I further understand feminist objectives as multiple. Feminism is a fragmented discipline that focuses on challenging systems of patriarchy (Tong, 2009). I align with post-structural feminism and deconstruct ways that heteronormative gendered discourses narrow conceptualizations of men and women.

At the outset of this research, I had developed a theoretical understanding of feminism but did not see my experiences as deeply gendered as I now do at the completion. My process of engaging with a feminist research project over a span of 5 years has shaped how I have learned gender (Taber & Gouthro, 2006). In the time since the outset of this research I have seen both an insurgence of feminist discourses promoted through popular media and world leaders while simultaneously feeling pressure posed upon women in academia and women in career streams. As celebrities call for equal opportunities for women, strong anti-feminist discourses have operated to marginalize women (Walby, 2011). Most recently, media coverage of the American presidential election has revealed complex anti-feminist discourses that permeate Western thought. With a surprising win by Donald Trump, whom many women have accused of sexual assault, many accused Facebook of influencing the election by circulating false information that vilified his female opponent, Hilary Clinton (Mozur & Scott, 2016). Meanwhile, Hilary Clinton and her followers strove to circulate feminist-focused ad campaigns such as "I'm with Her" and Facebook groups such as #pantsuitnation (Kerr, 2016). Facebook became a space where politicians campaigned, media outlets distributed information, and users debated social issues. These activities generated discourses related to gender. These discourses shape content on Facebook and influence ways gender is learned.

As a cis-gender, married woman, I engage with multiple, competing discourses that are often circulated and reinforced through social media. Social media is a space where I represent my digital subjectivity and where I read, discuss, and learn about current events. At times, content and conversations on Facebook support my positionality

and align with my perspectives. Facebook then becomes a place where I feel supported, comforted, respected, and even empowered. However, at other times, different conversations challenge, undermine, and dismiss feminist standpoints. At these times, I feel isolated, angry, and disenfranchised. On my Facebook, other users' posts reflect conflicting discourses that are rarely feminist.

More often than not, dominant discourses on my Facebook feed reinforce heteronormative gender ideals (Connell & Pearse, 2015). On Facebook, I receive more positive feedback when I post content related to domesticity such as marriage and housekeeping than I do when I contribute critical, feminist, political, or work-related content. This feedback and engagement with gendered discourses negatively influence my confidence as a female academic and shapes my digital engagement. As such, I try to balance acceptable feminine content (such as friendly conversation, appealing photos, and humorous articles) with critical content.

I have noticed that I receive more Facebook likes for engagement photos than shared articles regarding feminist activism. Such responses to posted content implies notions of acceptable and unacceptable digital engagement.In an experiment, my spouse and I both posted the same article on Facebook that criticized Elf on a Shelf as panopticon (Foucault, 1977; Holley, 2014). An Elf doll is accompanied by a book that explains Santa has sent an Elf to watch them and report bad behaviour that will negatively impact their Christmas gifts. Every night, parents, caregivers, and teachers move the doll to create the impression that the Elf is indeed alive and watching children at all times.

Upon critiquing this method of surveillance, my husband received likes and comments of support for his thoughtful, academic post, while I was criticized for my insensitivity and naiveté in not knowing what it is like to have children. Backlash from my Facebook friends has influenced my digital participation and impacted offline relationships. I often used to post politically charged content and carefully constructed anecdotes. Other users rarely liked these posts and occasionally responded with critique or argument. I felt disliked. I became exhausted from the digital fight and worried about how I was perceived. I wondered what picture of me people would see and worried about how I was representing myself. I did not want other users to perceive me as insensitive, ignorant, irrational or extremist. I also wanted people to be aware of issues that I believed needed more awareness. So, I stripped back my digital presence. I removed acquaintances, personal pictures, and extreme posts. I limited my engagement so that few people can see my posts, and my personal life is kept private. I have tried to remove myself from the observable field (Foucault, 1977) so that I no longer felt pressure from gendered digital norms. I still read posts from feminists and occasionally engage in conversation. But, I understand the informal learning I do through Facebook as just one of many digital sites through which I acquire information, engage in critical conversation, and reframe my perspective.

Discourses of gender roles and domesticity have nearly derailed me for many moments of completing my higher education. They have even permeated into my thoughts that have instilled a continual sense of imposter syndrome in the academy and guilt for being an inadequate woman. At times, my digital engagement heightened these feelings. In speaking with my participants, I realize that this fight for gender equality, this

fight to dismantle gendered power relations, is one that is far from over, and one that is shifting to take different forms through different social spaces.

My experiences are seen through the lens of a White, cis-gendered female and thus dynamic and intersecting with systems of privilege. Examining my positionality is an ongoing process and requires reflexivity in research in connection with day-to-day lived experiences (Tilley, 2016). As such, I cannot claim that this research may have universalizing implications but rather emphasize the importance of sharing the voices of feminists' experiences and call for continued and increased representations of diverse standpoints beyond the scope of this research. This research and the lens with which I approach this research is one piece of a wider digital landscape for learning about feminism and feminist activism.

Rationale

This research explores ways that some women learn about and advocate for feminism through Facebook groups. As such, those interacting, researching, educating, and learning within social network sites may gain deeper understandings of how online feminist spaces are constructed and maintained through various gendered discourses and power relations. Specifically, those interacting in these spaces may benefit from understanding different perspectives regarding online engagement and may gain further insight into the implications of their engagement. This research may further qualitative research approaches for digital spaces such as Facebook and may also further understandings of how these digital spaces can be used for adult learning. Through understanding interaction within these spaces, possibilities for social network sites as

liberatory spaces may be extended. It is further important to understand some ways that these spaces are utilized and how some users perceive the effects of such use.

How gender is socially constructed through online discourses influences how gender is understood and represented in broader social contexts. Although first- and second-wave feminism have made significant progress in procuring equal rights between those who are gendered as men and women, it is important to explore how these genders are constituted and reproduced. Furthermore,

> since, until the last 30 years or so, the category "woman" has been so locked into humanism's inscription of the world, post-structural feminists are only beginning to accomplish the deconstructive work on the subject, on the concept *woman*, in particular, that post-structuralism enables. (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 505)

Post-structural feminist theory provides a lens to understand how gendered power relations are represented. Knowledge is constructed through digital interaction within social network sites. As such, for this research, I understand social network sites as digital learning communities. This research may, therefore, contribute to a growing body of literature that analyzes and explores possibilities for social network sites as spaces for informal learning (e.g., Conrad & Spencer, 2006; Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Greenhow, 2010). How users create and interact within these digital learning communities reflects offline constructive processes. As such, this research may also support an emerging body of literature that examines ways alternate discourses are generated and supported online (e.g., Cohen & Raymond, 2011; Daniels, 2012; Gregg, 2006; Liddiard, 2014).

Research regarding gender advocacy within social network sites may further scholarship that explores transformative possibilities and barriers for marginalized standpoints. As such, it is important to be "attentive to the ways in which power, contestation, and hierarchy inscribe participatory technologies and processes" (Burwell, 2010, p. 385). Finally, this research expands current understandings of adult education contexts while also extending feminist engagement to include digital contexts.

Looking Forward

This chapter described gendered contexts for Facebook participation and situated this research within broader social contexts for digital feminism. The chapter also stated the research questions that will guide the proceeding chapters. Chapter 2 discusses current literature related to adult education, feminism, and Facebook. Chapter 3 details post-structural feminist research and the methodology I used in this research. Chapter 4 describes findings from my data analysis, including: learning feminist positionality, digital feminist contexts, gendered power relations, and online engagement. Chapter 5 concludes the research findings, discusses research implications, and calls for the continued need for exploring gendered power relations in digital contexts.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review literature that is relevant to my research objective: to explore learning experiences of women who engage with feminism on Facebook. I review literature that connects with the following themes: post-structural feminism, Canadian adult education, social movement learning, and Facebook. In reviewing this literature, I undertake a hermeneutic circle framework that holds that the review process changes the researcher's understanding of the field as "relevant literature… is influenced by each new paper read and interpreted" (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010, p. 132). As such, I did not establish criteria for relevance at the outset of the review, but rather, developed and revisited throughout the review process.

To develop my theoretical framework, I began by reading key theorists in the fields of Western Feminisms, Canadian Adult Education, and Social Network Sites (both separately and joint). Reading theoretical works often inspired further searching and analysis. For example, reading Judith Butler's theory of gender construction inspired my curiosity to explore ways gendered discourses are understood. Upon developing a theoretical and conceptual framework to understand my research, I then used Brock University's library portal, Google scholar, academia.edu to search for keywords that connected to my research topic. I then filtered these results by selecting texts that best reflected my theoretical framework and supported my research questions. I used terminology and works-cited from the most relevant texts to re-search different texts. At times this led me outside of my area of research, and so I went back to my research questions where I reconsidered and reaffirmed my research objectives. In my reading of

literature, I have reshaped my research questions to include more focused and distinct objectives.

To position Facebook within social movement learning and feminist research, I detail post-structural feminism. I first describe feminism as a complex discipline to historically and conceptually position post-structural feminism. I explore historical contexts and current manifestations of feminism to understand ways in which different forms of feminism are debated and why feminism is still necessary to challenge current systems of power. I focus extensively on post-structural feminism as the "third wave" of feminism that I use to theoretically frame this research, while further connecting post-structural feminism to former and future "waves."

Following my discussion of feminism, I outline theories of social movement learning with an emphasis on Canadian critical perspectives and discuss how social movement learning and post-structural feminism complement each other. To do so, I situate social movement learning within adult education and feminism.

Positioning Facebook within a feminist, adult education context, I discuss current literature regarding social network sites. I first detail ways social network sites have been used for social movements and then discuss current research about gender, online engagement, feminism, and social network sites.

Feminist Foundations: A Theoretical Framework

Feminism, as conceptualized within Western society, has evolved since its liberal feminist beginnings and has fragmented into several differing perspectives. Feminism is known to evolve in a series of waves that are in alignment with historical social contexts. As society shifts, so too does the way that feminists approach inequities. For example, the

origins of written Western feminism are connected to liberal feminism, which focuses predominantly on attaining equal rights for women (Tong, 2009). Liberal feminists worked at a time when women were not considered persons according to the law and did not have civil rights. Writing during the 18th century, Mary Wollstonecraft is perhaps one of the earliest documented liberal feminist writers. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft (1792/2001) argues that women can equal men in reason and therefore deserve the same rights as men, including access to education. Liberal feminism evolved into a definable movement now known as first-wave feminism. It focused on gaining women's political rights outside of the home and became a starting point for later feminist movements to add to and critique (Kinser, 2004).

Subsequent waves of feminism have built on and critiqued liberal feminism. Critics argue that in focusing on equal rights, liberal feminism assumes that all women are equal and promotes sameness over difference without considering sociocultural markers such as race, class, ability, or sexuality (Butler, 1999; Hill-Collins, 2004; hooks, 2000a, 2000b). Liberal feminism also often assumes that women can be equal to men, and in doing so places responsibility on women to attain equality with men without changing social structures and systems that perpetuate gender marginalization. Furthermore, liberal feminism's emphasis on *a women's* movement assumed collective gendered oppression that did not adequately represent the diversity of women's experiences.

Later movements, often categorized as second-wave, reacted to and built upon this traditional body of thought (Tong, 2009). Second-wave feminism supports diverse lenses to approach issues of gender. For example, Marxist feminists explore how

economic systems influence women's marginalization while post-colonial feminists explore how race and geographical location intersect with gender to differently marginalize women. Other bodies of feminism include psychoanalytic (focusing on psychoanalytic and Freudian theory), environmental (focusing on women's relationship with the environment), care-focused (focusing on women as care-givers in society), radical (focusing on sisterhood and ending sexism), and third wave (focusing on redefining women; Tong, 2009). Such feminist movements as defined by Tong (2009) do not necessarily encompass all bodies of feminism, but rather highlight ways different lenses may approach feminism.

Writing in response to first- and second-wave feminism, third-wave feminists such as Nicholson (1989) argue that "feminist theory exhibited a recurrent pattern: its analyses tended to reflect the viewpoints of white, middle-class women of North America and Western Europe" (p. 1). Alternative feminist movements emerged to take up positions that were not addressed by White, middle-class, Western feminists. This fracturing of feminism is viewed as problematic by hooks (2015), who argues that "special-interest groups lead women to believe that only socialist feminists should be concerned about class; that only lesbian feminists should be concerned about the oppression of lesbians and gay men; that only black women or other women of color should be concerned about racism" (p. 64). To extend notions of feminism to include a range of lenses and perspectives, it is necessary to "ensure the inclusion of a multitude of points of view" (Nicholson, 1989, p. 3). Or, as hooks (2015) argues, develop feminist "sisterhood" and "solidarity" (p. 64). Third-wave feminism, which includes post-structural feminism, challenged collective feminist discourses to represent diversity and

destabilized patriarchal and heteronormative systems of power (Benhabib, Butler, Cornell, & Fraser, 1990; Tong, 2009).

Post-Structuralism and Feminism

Post-structural feminism is largely influenced by post-structuralism, which disrupts singular truths and posits that discourse shapes social experiences. At a time where equal rights and equal pay may appear to have been achieved, post-structuralism interrogtates the power relations that often render inequalities invisible and the discourses that maintain and normalize power relations. From a post-structuralist perspective, social institutions operate as disciplinary apparatuses to control, reinforce, and uphold correct behaviour through manipulating spaces and increasing surveillance (Foucault, 1977). Importantly, Foucault (1977) conceptualizes power as productive and circulatory. For Foucualt, power is closely connected with knowledge in that knowledge and accepted truths are influenced by ways power relations operate. Power is not asserted or possessed but rather operates through relations (between people and institutions). These power relations influence discourses which shape ways of thinking and being in the world. Foucualt uses the term "disciplinary power" to represent ways power relations produce knowledge and categories of understanding. Subjects and their subjectivities (people and the ways they construct and are constructed) are mediated by power relations. Subjects can enact agency and resist. Through resistance, subjects shape the discourses that influence knowledge.

Post-structural feminism interrogates the hidden power relations that underpin or influence inequities. Post-structural feminism "takes issue with the technology of control, the silent regulation, deployed by signifiers such as 'power,' 'voice, 'democratic

freedoms,' and the 'class, race, gender' triplet" (Luke & Gore, 1992, p. 4). Post-structural

feminists seek to uncover and challenge systems of normalization and taken-for-granted

truths such as binaries of gender and sex (Butler, 1999). Post-structural feminism begins

to deconstruct and expose gendered power relations.

     The post-structural feminist works that I use to frame this research connect with a

Foucauldian tradition of conceptualizing power relations. I draw from works of feminists

such as Butler (1999), Haraway (1991), Gore (1992), Luke (1992), and Lather (2004).

These theorists posit ways power is interwoven through a series of relations that

discipline and regulate bodies relative to gender norms.

     Bodies. Bodies represent our physical existence in the world. As a physical

manifestation of self, they can be mobilized, altered, manipulated, interpreted, and read.

Bodies are thus not static or fixed. In a post-structural context, bodies are "an object and

target of power [through which they can be] … "subjected, used, transformed and

improved" (Foucault, 1977, p. 136). Haraway (1991) argues that limitations to bodies are

artificially imposed and bodily differences that denote male and female sexes are

arbitrary. Further, boundaries are oppressively imposed on those defined as women. She

uses the metaphor of mapping to describe these boundaries:

> boundaries are drawn by mapping practices; "objects" do not pre-exist as such.
> Objects are boundary projects. Boundaries shift from within; boundaries are very
> tricky. What boundaries provisionally contain remains generative, productive of
> meaning and bodies. (Haraway, 1991, p. 201)

Bodies are perceived through socially constructed boundaries. These boundaries are influenced and altered through power relations (Butler, 1993; Haraway, 1991). Furthermore, as Butler (1993) states,

> once "sex" itself is understood in its normativity, the materiality of the body will not be thinkable apart from the materialization of the regulatory norm. "Sex" is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description if what one is; it will be one of the norms by which the "one" becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility. (p. 2)

For post-structural feminists such as Butler and Haraway, sex is often viewed as a scientific category that determines gender. This sexed category of male or female categorizes humans into two categories. With this categorization of bodies, sexless or "asexual" becomes abnormal, if not impossible, and always understood relative to the norm from which it deviates.

Gender. Bodily behaviours and representations are constructed, defined, and policed according to conceptualizations of gender (Butler, 1999). Characteristics such as gaits, stances, posture, gestures, voice tone, and expressions are perceived as feminine or masculine. In what Butler (1999) describes as "the heterosexual matrix," females (sex) are expected to act feminine (gender), and males (sex) are to act masculine (gender). This alignment of sex and gender is rarely questioned and maintains normative gender expectations. Drawing on Foucault (1977), Butler (1999) argues that "acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause" (p. 185). Through power relations, discourses

discipline bodily composition (and representation of gender) by influencing external

representation, which in turn becomes internalized and reproduced (Foucault, 1977).

Deviations from gender expectations are often perceived as abnormal and subject

to disciplining measures. Those who enact non-normative are labeled as "other" and may

be separated from "normal" society physically (through mental hospitals and the prison

system) and discursively (through labelling practices and visual representation)

(Foucault, 1965, 1977). For example, there is an extensive history of discursive gender

legitimization through scientific practices (Haraway, 1991). As discussed in Donna

Haraway's (1991) work, primate behaviours such as dominance, competition,

cooperation, and caregiving are understood through discourses. "Natural" connections

between sex and gender are reinforced and used to sustain normative gender behaviours

as healthy behaviours. As such, ties between sex and gender are discursively produced as

natural and innate qualities of sexed beings.

Butler (1999) argues that gender is naturalized and reinforced through repeated

discursive acts. She argues that gender is not innately determined by sex and instead "is

the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory

frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of

being" (Butler, 1999, p. 45). People repeat gendered acts in adherence to social norms

through which they "congeal" or begin to produce the illusion of "real" existence.

Through such repetition, the constructed origin is lost. In other words, we begin to forget

the authorship of the act and begin to see the act as unquestionable reality. As such,

gender is performative: a "discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it

names" (Butler, 1993, p. 13). Performative acts are not willfully chosen but are rooted in

and influenced by a social and historical context (Butler, 1993). Without recognizing authorship, gender becomes naturalized and thus entrenched in our habits and perceptions. To uproot such entrenchment requires a critical unlearning of gender which requires questioning the acts and representations that produce our current gendered perceptions.

To question gendered acts requires understanding and unpacking Butler's (1993) notion of performativity. Butler argues that subjects may contribute to or challenge gendered power relations through ways they performatively cite gender. She states, "the norm of sex takes hold to the extent that it is 'cited' as such a norm, but it also derives its power through the citations that it compels" (Butler, 1993, p. 13). While alternative or non-conforming gender representations may be viewed as failures or impossibilities, they also destabilize notions of fixed or static gender (Butler, 1999).

While destabilizing gender may appear as a theoretical endeavor, it has practical implications for challenging oppressive power relations. As Connell and Pearse (2015) argue, post-structural approaches to feminism and queer theory unpack ways gendered discourses influence lived experiences. For example, "the discourses of fashion and beauty… positions women as consumers, subjects them to humiliating tests of acceptability, enforces arbitrary rules, and is responsible for much unhappiness, ill health, and even some deaths by starvation in countries that have giant food surpluses" (Connell & Pearse, 2015, p. 77). Oppressive discourses, such as those rampant in the fashion and beauty industry, must be identified and critiqued to then be alternatively represented.

Understanding sex and gender through a post-structural approach gives insight into ways gender and sex representations are valued, privileged, and regulated. While

feminism often focuses on women, post-structural feminism troubles notions of sexed

bodies on which gender acts. This deconstruction opens possibilities for gender

representations and reconsiders notions of idealized bodies. Importantly, deconstruction

interrogates binaries of sex and the assumed correlating genders. Processes of sex and

gender deconstruction untangle connections between sex and idealized gender

representations. In doing so, post-structural feminism opens space to reimagine gendered

bodies.

Situated knowledges. Post-structural feminism often focuses on discourse and

gender as oppressive constructs. As a political standpoint, post-structural feminists are

critical of sameness: "'us-ness' against 'themness'" (Ellsworth, 1992, p. 106). Instead,

post-structural feminists "envision collective struggle that starts from an acknowledgment

that 'unity'—interpersonal, personal, and political- is necessarily fragmentary, unstable,

not given, but chosen and struggled for—but not on the basis of 'sameness'" (Ellsworth,

1992, p. 107). Importantly, post-structural feminists value ways sex and gender are

constructed and ways such constructions are differently valued according to socio-

cultural-political contexts. Women do not experience the same oppression in the same

ways. In rejecting sameness, post-structural feminists resist grand narratives that seek to

account for experiences. Post-structural feminism instead holds that "social identities are

complex and heterogeneous" (Fraser & Nicholson, 1989, p. 89).

Because post-structural feminism does not always have clear boundaries, other

feminist theorists may critique it as lacking a political standpoint. Reacting to this

critique, Luke and Gore (1992) state: "grounded in a politics of embodied identities,

differences, and historical location, these theories do not give up their foundations in

attempts to alter the gender regime" (p. 5). In other words, post-structural feminism's support of multiple subjectivities and situated knowledges is a standpoint (Butler, 1995; Haraway, 1991; Luke & Gore, 1992). Furthermore, sameness is not required to challenge gender regimes and power relations.

In supporting subjectivity, post-structuralism deconstructs objectivity. Haraway (1991) argues that objectivity is disembodied and upheld through rhetoric and manufactured knowledge. As such, there is no real objectivity, only subjectivities masked by discourse as being objective. Consider the case of sex and gender. According to Haraway (1991), understandings of sex and gender as innate are due to patriarchal and heteronormative discourses that tie the two together and root them in scientific fact. In this regard, discourses materialize bodies and gender in ways that position subjects differently from one another. She argues that exploration of how bodily materialization may give insight into ways bodies are experienced.

For Haraway (1991), deconstructing patriarchal scientific claims that discursively produce bodies and gender boundaries is a feminist endeavor. To do so, it is imperative to claim situatedness and value partialized perspectives. Haraway (1991) states,

> I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being here to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people's lives; the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity. (p. 195)

Haraway (1991) furthers that "feminism is about a critical vision consequent upon a critical positioning in an inhomogeneous gendered social space. Translation is always

interpretive, critical, and partial" (p. 195). Knowledges are always multiple and contingent on the situatedness and partiality of the knower. In connecting situatedness with ways body and gender are materialized, post-structural feminists do not work towards a single theory but instead value partiality and difference.

      Implications of post-structural feminism. If upholding women as a stable category is no longer possible, then what relevance does feminism maintain? In her discussion of conflicts within feminist theory, Dietz (2003) highlights problems raised by post-structural feminism.; she states, "various formulations of gender and sex and their relation to difference… moved feminist theory toward what was widely understood as a 'crisis of identity' within the field" (p. 402). This crisis pitted earlier feminist waves against third-wave feminism (including post-structural and postmodern feminism).

      Third-wave feminists argued that the very category of "women" was exclusionary and that theorists should expand to focus on gender. In response, first-and second-wave feminists viewed theoretical paradigm shifts towards "post" theories as a direct challenge to feminism. Perhaps most notably, Benhabib (1995) argues that feminism and post-structuralism cannot work as allies as post-structuralism's challenging of history, agent subjects, and metaphysics cannot support feminism's emancipatory objectives. Additionally, post theories (postmodernism/post-structuralism) and their opposition to grand theories lead to fragmentation that cannot support effective social change. Most pointedly, Benhabib (1995) states that,

      postmodernism undermines the feminist commitment to women's agency and

      sense of selfhood, to the appropriation of women's own history in the name of an

emancipated future, and to the excursive of radical social criticism which uncovers gender "in all its endless variety and monotonous similarity." (p. 29)

In rebuttal to feminism's "identity crisis," Nicholson (1989) highlights the dangers of united definitions of women, stating that they "are not only that of shutting out the experiences of women not white, Western, middle-class and of the late twentieth century, but of constructing notions of self-identity which are implicitly heterosexist" (p. 15). Through decentering the subject of women and interrogating White, patriarchal, heterosexist assumptions used to define women, feminists can broaden gender categories to represent and value a variety of gendered experiences. Importantly, as Fraser and Nicholson (1989) argue, post-structural feminism "is a practice made up of a patchwork of overlapping alliances, not one circumscribable by an essential definition" (p. 102). Butler (1995) argues that postmodern and post-structural approaches do not necessarily aim for a utopian emancipation, but rather open sites such as gender to "permanent political contestation" (p. 43). Furthermore, understanding gendered subjects as culturally constituted (rather than culturally a priori essentialist agents) opens possibility for resignification processes that "rework[s] the very matrix of power by which we are constituted... reconstitute[s] the legacy of that constitution, and... work[s] against each other those processes of regulation that can destabilize existing power regimes" (p. 47). Instead, "a radical rethinking of the ontological constructions of identity appears to be necessary in order to formulate a representational politics that might revive feminism on other grounds" (Butler, 1999, p. 7).

Feminism and Social Movement Learning

The field of adult education is expansive. Specifically, the field considers activities, processes, and systems involved in the education of adults beyond formal education (Selmen, Selmen, Cooke, & Dampier, 1998). Social movement learning approaches to adult education does not necessarily consider age in their definitions but focus on community-based learning that encourages, negotiates, or resists social change (Spencer & Lange, 2014). Importantly, much Canadian adult education theory holds that "learning opportunities should be accessible to all adults, regardless of age, background, and status" (Nesbit, 2013, p. 4). In this section, I situate Facebook as an educational site within social movement learning.

Broadly, Canadian adult education perspectives are supported by critical theory and driven by transformative learning objectives (Lange, 2013). Historically, theorists have viewed education and learning as means to overcome social injustices (Welton, 2013). For example, women's rights movements supported informal and non-formal learning that facilitated women's access to improved wages, medical care, political representation, and safer work conditions (Welton, 2013). Despite achieving many liberal feminist objectives of equal rights in Canada, the work of feminism continues as new challenges related to gender persist (Walby, 2011). As feminist challenges and objectives shift so too does engagement and representation of feminism (Walby, 2011). For Tisdell (1993), feminism relates to adult education and learning. She argues that adult education encourages learners to explore and learn ways structured power relations impact personal lives and can be resisted. Such learning may take place within formally structured adult education contexts within communities or higher education classes (Tisdell, 1993).

However, learning may also take place informally through social movements (Hall, 2006).

Social Movement Learning

Hall (2006) defines social movement learning as "(a) learning by persons who are part of any social movement and (b) learning by persons outside of a social movement as a result of the actions taken or simply by the existence of social movements" (p. 230). Hall (2006) argues that social movement learning is both informal and incidental. The means of learning are contingent on the actors within the social movement. Importantly, social movement learning considers the voices of those who are engaged with social movements by considering "the voices, ideas, perspectives and theories produced by those engaged in social struggles [that] are often ignored, rendered invisible, or overwritten with accounts by professionalized or academic experts" (Choudry & Kapoor, 2010, p. 2).

Importantly, Choudry and Kapoor (2010) argue that social movements generate both implicit and explicit learning, whether through direct engagement or exposure. Additionally, not all social movement learning is critical or progressive and may instead reinforce status quos (Choudry & Kapoor, 2010). It is thus important to recognize that social movements may range from bringing awareness to women's assault to silencing women who are assault survivors. Choudry and Kapoor (2010) and Steinklammer (2012) argue that social movement learning considers subtle and informal ways people learn through witnessing or participating in social movements. They value knowledge as inseparable from experience. Referencing Freire's (1970) notion of praxis, Choudry and

Kapoor (2010) explore ways theory and practice are mutually constitutive and inseparable when considering social movement learning.

In social movement learning, activists learn about issues pertinent to their cause and may incidentally develop theoretical understandings that inform their participation in social action. Additionally, learning is evident in decision-making processes that activists use to navigate, overcome, or submit to barriers (Steinklammer, 2012). Highlighting the complexities of activist learning, Jubas (2011) explores ways that formal learning skills such as ethical product research can be connected with incidental learning in everyday acts such as shopping. She argues that everyday acts such as shopping can be sites where holistic, critical, adult learning can take place (Jubas, 2011). For example, in the case of shopping, developing a personal shopping philosophy and engaging in decision-making processes highlight ways this act employs both formal and informal learning. Furthermore, in doing so, the participants are engaging in a critical, perhaps even activist, learning.

Learning how to reinforce, resist, and change social norms is enmeshed within complicated and oppressive power relations (Steinklammer, 2012). Furthermore, learning in social movements may not be planned or intended. Learning may be an unanticipated outcome of engaging with a social movement. As Steinklammer (2012) argues,

> There has to be more emphasis on the importance of voluntary and spontaneous learning processes directly tied to the collective political practice and experiences of social movements. This has to be taken as a starting point for planned education processes. Thus, it is necessary to pursue pedagogy from the viewpoint of the learners and to act accordingly. (p. 37)

Thus, to understand social movement learning, especially in the context of feminism, researchers must understand the experiences of the learners. Feminism has many divergent and ranging perspectives. With little agreed upon movement objectives, participants in feminism as a social movement may learn in a range of ways and work towards a range of outcomes.

Hall (2012) highlights ways social network sites support diverse voices and collective authorship within social movements:

> when one combines the learning resources available via Twitter, Facebook, web sites, blogs, wikis and even image sites such as Tumblr or Instagram, we have living social movement encyclopedias, but ones that are 'written' by each one of us as we choose what and where to read. (p. 137)

In this way, web 2.0 spaces are post-structural sites, supporting the representation of multiple truths and standpoints. Furthermore, these same sites open lines of communication and participation. As Valenzuela (2013) argues, "social media can influence collective action [by] providing mobilizing information and news not available in other media, facilitating the coordination of demonstrations, allowing users to join political causes, and creating opportunities to exchange opinions with other people" (p. 921). In this way, social media not only allows users to be co-constructors of knowledge but also can prompt engagement and dialogue.

In addition to being sites for social movements to be created, web 2.0 sites also act as archives or knowledge repositories (Steinklammer, 2012). Social movement learning in Facebook contexts allows ideas and theories to be "forged outside of academe, often incrementally, collectively, and informally" (Choudry, 2009, p. 6). This

incremental, collective, and informal learning online is often under researched and undervalued because formal education is often viewed as generating legitimized learning and official knowledges (Choudry, 2015). However, it is important to consider these sites for informal learning as "social movements and activist milieus are also terrains of struggle over power, knowledge and ideas, including what constitutes legitimate or authoritative knowledge" (Choudry, 2015, p. 93). Researching social movement learning through Facebook allows insight into spaces where social norms such as gender are renegotiated and contested. Additionally, research exploring online feminism considers ways "ordinary people have the potential to take control over their lives, that their consciousness emerges through struggle" (Choudry, 2015, p. 94-95). Social movement learning thus emphasizes ways knowledge is produced through social interactions and that these social interactions may, in turn, build movements.

Counter-Discourses and Learning Digital Activism

In this section, I discuss current research regarding social movements and social networking sites, including ways activism is learned and participated in online. This section also discusses the implications of digital counter-discourses.

Recently, researchers have attempted to understand emergences of social movements in online communities, the effectiveness of political participation online, and future directions for online activist engagement. Perhaps most notably, research has examined the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, and #MeToo as examples of online movements that have successfully gained offline traction (DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, 2012; Langman, 2013). Reasons for their success may include ways these movements

push back against dominant media narratives, unite diverse voices, and mobilize international protest.

Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring are two of the earliest and most impactful social movements that social media facilitated. Occupy Wall Street became an international movement to raise awareness and push back against corporate greed and unjust laws that perpetuate the large wealth disparity. This movement began through discussions and posts on social media. Activists within the movement used social media to "create new contexts for activism that do not exist in the world of traditional mass media organization" (DeLuca et al., 2012, p. 500). As the conversation grew online, major news outlets attempted to discredit and minimize the movement through limited, negative coverage (DeLuca et al., 2012).

Langman (2013) theorizes that social movement within online contexts needs to have a legitimized crisis that has supported individual and collective identity formation, emotions, and moral imperatives. These elements of social movements are facilitated through social network sites that have "enhanced the weak and enabled the masses to confront the power of few" (Langman, 2013, p. 517). In his analysis of Occupy Wall Street, Langman (2013) argues that online social movements signify a starting point for resistance against neoliberal governance. Studying Ukrainian protests, Onuch (2015) reflects Langman's positive views of social media for social movement and argues that Facebook allows for rapid sharing of information and increased media exposure that can facilitate on-the-ground protest and social movement. Importantly, Facebook's tools such as "likes," "shares," "posts," "groups," and "pages" are used to organize social movements.

Similarly, Tremayne (2013) tracked early Twitter use for Occupy Wall Street. Using Occupy Wall Street as an example of online protest, Tremayne conducted a network analysis to unpack ways that the #OccupyWallStreet movement emerged through Twitter. Importantly, this research was motivated by popular debates regarding reproductive and subversive uses of social media. In tracking Twitter use for Occupy Wall Street, Tramayne found that this social movement began from expressions of dissatisfaction with income divides and was further instigated by Adbusters, which first used the term #OccupyWallStreet. Exploring #OccupyWallStreet as a social movement emphasizes two key components of activism within social network sites: (a) ways online community dialogue regarding perceived injustice can support social action and (b) ways that larger agencies can influence a social movement.

In exploring mediating mechanisms for social network sites and activism, Valenzuela (2013) argues that social media may support protest and activist engagement by facilitating access to news, political expression, and knowledge mobilization. Surveying 1,737 young adults living in Chile, Valenzuela (2013) found that social media can facilitate political protest practices and further amplify existing social movements. Similarly, Hirzalla and van Zoonen (2011) found that offline and online activities converged when engaging with politics and activism. For example, youths used the Internet to learn about politics and activism by searching various topics through online search engines. Their online engagement influenced offline discussion of politics. While, traditionally, research has been conducted to reaffirm online/offline debates, Hirzalla and van Zoonen (2011) argue that due to a variety of modes of political engagement, "online activities… can be part of a broader action repertoire that includes civic activities offline

as well and that online and offline actives can supplement each other per mode" (p. 492).

Both Burwell (2010) and Collin (2008) examine how the Internet can be used to promote participation in democratic dialogue. To explore ways the Internet influences political participation of youths, Collin (2008) interviewed 13 Australians involved in an NGO. He found that the participants used the Internet to participate in projects that were important to them in ways that they believed made a difference. Furthermore, the participants voiced that formal institutions such as the government were "old, exclusive, and hierarchical" (p. 535) and that the Internet was "considered to be open and democratic, resisting the tendency to control or manage forms of participation" (p. 536). Collin (2008) argues that definitions of political participation should shift from involvement with government policy to include youth and community developed digital spaces. Similarly, Burwell (2010) investigates political participation by exploring case studies of transgressive rewritings of popular culture texts within interactive environments. Burwell (2010) argues that it is necessary to critically analyze seemingly passive forms of digital engagement as they "may be both simultaneously and, more than that, are always transformative in some way, creating new cultural ground that must constantly be renegotiated" (p. 395). As such, digital participatory cultures may be important sites for political participation and social transformation.

Since the #OccupyWallStreet movement, many social movements have used social media to raise awareness and mobilize activism. Researchers have used the term hashtag activism to describe social movements that unfold online (Clark, 2016; Yang, 2016). Hashtag activism, or more specifically, hashtag feminism, may take place entirely online and may never mobilize beyond the digital (Clark, 2016). Importantly as Clark

(2016) argues, digital movements and hashtag activism are often valued based on their ability to mobilize offline, however digital discourse is "political in its own right" (p. 791). Online conversations and posts may contribute to changing discourses and leading to alternate cultural representations (Greenhow, 2011; Harris, 2008). As such, digital activists can discursively re/construct digital and gendered social contexts through which they are interacting (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Puente, 2011; Sassen, 2002).

Recent research gives insight into ways counter-discourses are generated and sustained online (Feltwell et al., 2017). In their case study analysis of two British multi-platform web campaigns, Feltwell et al. (2017) highlight the need for counter-discourse activism; they argue that "problematic portrayals of whole communities on social media… could lead to a lack of tolerance, respect, and inclusion, as well as fear, mistrust, and their marginalization" (p. 346). Furthermore, such problematic discourses may validate reforms that cut back on government support and rights for marginalized groups (Feltwell et al., 2017). Representations of digital political engagement varies through simple shares and likes of content or extending further into offline political action (Feltwell et al., 2017). Online social movements such as those in Feltwell et al.'s (2017) study rely on multiple levels of engagement (such as likes, shares, and posts) to raise awareness, extend reach, build content, and organize events.

Seeking to understand digital activism further, Shaw (2012, 2016) frames online political engagement as "discursive activism." Shaw (2016) defines discursive activism as "rhetorical action that intervenes in and creates new discourses by identifying and unpacking power relations in existing discourses" (p. 3). Such rhetorical action is represented in online "acts of political creativity, negotiation, dialogue, and productive

disagreement" (Shaw, 2016, p. 3). Exploring discursive activism, Shaw analyzes an Instagram page dedicated to posting screen captures of harassment by men towards women through online dating sites. She argues that sites such as this raise "discursive political points" (Shaw, 2016, p. 8) and articulate experiences that reflect broader societal issues. As such, discursive activism does not necessarily equate to offline protest but may raise awareness and shift thinking about women's lived experiences and behaviours that may threaten women's safety.

Focusing on gendered and disabled discourses, Liddiard (2014) considers how content circulated on the internet reinforces commodified and normalized notions of gendered disabled identities and subjectivities (Liddiard, 2014). According to Liddiard, images and conversations circulated on Facebook often represent idealized, beautiful bodies as adhering to gender and able-bodied norms of fitness and mobility. To challenge the perpetration of these discourses, disability activists have responded by posting images of non-normative, disabled bodies and have circulated information that encourages Facebook users to reconsider possibilities for different bodies (Liddiard, 2014). In doing so, activists contribute critical and diverse digital information to disrupt ableism and develop positive digital communities (Liddiard, 2014).

As users produce counter-discourses online, knowledge becomes varied. For example, Cohen and Raymond (2011) outline how digital conversations have expanded support for pregnant women. Their research focuses on forum-based websites where women interact and discuss experiences related to predetermined topics. The participants of these spaces could engage in conversations with women who have also experienced pregnancy rather than male doctors who they felt did not understand their experiences.

Highlighting how users of social network spaces informally learn, Cohen and Raymond (2011) state that "these forums serve to empower pregnant women to ask more questions and receive both answers and support in an environment that is largely free of negative judgment" (p. 194). As such, informal learning communities are important spaces for empowering women to challenge patriarchal and medicalized ways of knowing about gendered bodies and experiences.

Alternate knowledge production may be important for supporting social movement and feminist thought. For example, exploring gendered discourses of girls in popular media, Kelly and Pomerantz (2009) argue that media is an influential site that can both reproduce and challenge stereotypes of girls. Furthermore, because feminism is rarely discussed in formal education, popular culture texts may be important sties where "girls can imagine a different world at home, at school, or in their interactions with boys or other girls" (p. 15). Exposure to alternative gendered discourses may therefore help girls to reimagine possibilities and may even inspire further political participation (Kelly & Pomerantz, 2009). As such, it is important to consider ways media can support counter-discourses and feminist learning in ways that may not be available in formal education.

Perhaps most relevant to this research, Irving and English (2011) systemically analyzed 100 feminist organization websites in Canada. Addressing concerns for digital divides and access to technology, Irving and English (2011) highlight the importance of developing a digital presence and argue that online spaces have potential for supporting social movement. Although they do not specifically consider social network sites, through their analysis of several Canadian feminist organizations' websites they argue

that the Internet can be used to promote social movement learning (Irving & English, 2011). Unfortunately, Irving and English found that feminist organization websites were often underutilized and rarely updated and were thus not the most useful facilitators of feminist learning. Similarly, Harris (2008) uses gender as a lens to explore online DIY digital spaces and bring into question what counts as political engagement. Irving and English (2011) and Harris (2008) argue that political participation in these spaces is too often discounted. Specifically, Harris (2008) argues that "the need to interrogate the normative assumptions within paradigms of political participation is even more heightened in the case of *young* women, who are subject not only to patriarchal but age-based exclusions" (p. 483).

While research is supportive of social network sites' potential for liberatory space, both Harris (2008) and Irving and English (2011) agree that increased knowledge and skills concerning how technology is used to create liberatory spaces are needed to support social movement learning further. Furthermore, these spaces are subject to gendered power relations that may impact their success.

Gendered Power Relations in Digital Contexts

Space is often coded by gender "delineat[ing] what kinds of bodies are permitted and welcomed in certain kinds of spaces, and what kinds are not" (Cranny-Francis, Waring, Stavropoulos, & Kirkby, 2003, p. 212). Online spaces are not devoid of larger social contexts, and thus gender regimes may implicate ways users engaged with Facebook. How space is divided often contributes to the marginalization of women, associating women with domestic spaces and discouraging them from participating in public spheres (Cranny-Francis et al., 2003, p. 213). Spatial coding may thus restrict,

women's engagement in public spaces that influence social change. Furthermore, digital spaces reinforce offline gender norms and spatial coding (Bowen, 2009; Herbst, 2009; Jack, 2009). This section discusses current research that explores ways gender influences access to, and agency within, social networking sites.

Digital spaces as facilitated by the Internet are male-dominated at structural levels of coding and website development (Herbst, 2009) and social levels of top-rated and frequented blogs (Jack, 2009). The language of the Internet is a series of complex codes that are used, often by men, to create web pages (Herbst, 2009). These code-structured web pages, such as Friendster and Facebook, are also regulated according to their male web page creators and owners (Herbst, 2009). As Herbst (2009) argues,

> because programmers, especially in the more advanced computer languages that are required to sustain the architecture of virtual environments, are predominantly men, the maintenance of virtual spaces—thus the question of access, or the censuring of speech—is subject to a male perspective of behavioral norms. (p. 146)

As such, social networking sites' terms of use are often designed and enforced by male authority figures. Acceptable engagement online is policed and regulated as per broader gendered discourses. For example, before 2014, images of women breastfeeding on Facebook were removed and accounts were disabled per Facebook's policy on nudity (Chemaly, 2014). With widespread pushback through online campaigns such as #freethenipple, wider public conversations have encouraged Facebook to change their policy on female nudity and breastfeeding (Chemaly, 2014). Facebook's official statement now reads:

We agree that breastfeeding is natural and beautiful and we're glad to know that

it's important for mothers to share their experiences with others on Facebook.

The vast majority of these photos are compliant with our policies. (Facebook,

2019a, para. 1)

However, Facebook notes that it reviews photos based on reporting from other users.

Please note that the photos we review are almost exclusively brought to our

attention by other Facebook members who complain about them being shared on

Facebook. (Facebook, 2019a, para. 2)

Policies may shift following popular demand; however, what is deemed popular is not

always progressive and may still be subject to the interpretation of administration when

reviewing posts flagged by other users.

While digital identities relate to offline identities, digital spaces also "allow for

imagined and/or real relief not only from the limitations of embodiment itself but also

from the limitations placed upon bodies when they are positioned on the grids of (raced,

sexed, normalized) cultural meaning in limiting or oppressive ways" (Ellsworth, 2005, p.

124). Constructing an operable digital profile through which to engage online is a learned

process that considers, adheres to and challenges offline norms and expectations.

Postfeminist landscapes, where digital contexts and neoliberalism have converged,

produce consumable feminine feminists. Visibility in digital spaces increases surveillance

and expectations of femininity and have further supported climates of backlash against

radical feminism.

Digital performativity, gender, and knowledge constructions take on multiple

meanings as they are shaped and interpreted by an assumed audience and peer interaction

(Pearson, 2009; Robards & Bennett, 2011). Male-written blogs are more frequently viewed and highly rated than female written blogs (Jack, 2009). Furthermore, female-authored blogs are often associated with domesticity and thus undervalued in comparison to male-written political blogs (Daniels, 2012). Armstrong and McAdams (2009) examined American undergraduate students' perceptions of credibility in male and female written blogs. In two separate studies, they surveyed 586 and 786 participants, respectively. In both studies, female participants accounted for 58% of the participants. The researchers had participants read blogs with altered pseudonyms and author biographies to indicate gender. After the participants had read the blogs, they were instructed to complete a survey that rated the credibility of the blogs. In doing so, Armstrong and McAdams found that "blog posts [were] more credible when perceived as written by men rather than by women, when other factors remained consistent" (p. 447).

In response to male privileging in digital spaces, some women have assumed non-female identities for safety when discussing politically sensitive topics (Herbst, 2009). For example, a female blogger blogging about digital predators received an influx of hate emails and digital harassment. She believed that she may have avoided digital harassment if she had written under a male name as the blog was politically charged and written from a female perspective. Herbst (2009) analyzes this experience by stating:

> along with women's speech, women's interests—including women's interest in technology—are challenged whenever a woman is harassed online. Moreover, female presence on the Internet is an ambiguous one as women have also repeatedly acknowledged that a non-female identity in cyberspace is the safer way to travel. (p. 142)

Digital spaces support postmodern subjectivities where gender can be differently and unconventionally performed online in experimental, resistant, and strategic ways (Armentor-Cota, 2011). Herbst (2009) contends that "the concealment of female identity in virtual spaces has quantifiable implications. There could hardly exist a better example with which to compare the suppression of female names online than our patriarchal social structure in which a man's name dominates" (p. 143). It would thus seem that gendered barriers regulate and restrict women's engagement in technological spaces in ways that reaffirm patriarchal social hierarchies.

As society moves towards increased access to and sharing of knowledge, gender divides persist. As women risk further marginalization, it is pertinent for them "to participate in it actively from a position of independence, choice, capabilities, and action" (Hafkin & Huyer, 2006, p. 1). Hafkin and Huyer (2006) suggest that women's agency must be promoted so that they become active constructors and disseminators of knowledge within technological spaces.

Although tensions remain evident in perceptions of social network use, gender, and technology, researchers seem to remain hopeful as to social network sites' liberatory potential. In their discussion of female blogging communities, both Bowen (2009) and Jack (2009) are optimistic that women's engagement can be used as acts of resistance and transformation. Bowen (2009) argues that through blogging and continued engagement in digital spaces, "women can articulate bodies of knowledge based on their own experiences and perceptions, and in so doing, subvert and redefine extant discourses" (p. 311). Women's blogging can thus challenge gendered discourses that permeate digital spaces and uphold heteronormative gender binaries. While more work needs to be done

to involve women in website coding practices, women can work within predetermined structures to transform them. Researching the women's blog group, *We Have Brains*, Jack (2009) found that

> members find value in these communication practices while simultaneously challenging the borders that devalue them in the first place. The technology of blogging itself did not automatically give rise to this type of communication and community building. Instead, *We Have Brains* members consciously work to enact these strategies when they write topic prompts, respond to others members, and occasionally step in… in order to mediate disagreements and reinforce the values of the community. (p. 342)

Sharing Jack's (2009) optimism, Harris (2008) maintains that social connectedness through social network sites "is a way to create community and to share resources and ultimately create alliances for activism" (p. 271).

Little research has explored online activist self-representation; however, some research has explored digital self-representation (Davies, 2013; Goode, 2010; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Nagy & Koles, 2014). Goode (2010) argues that self-representation can be informally learned through interactions with friends and family. As such, it can be viewed "as a product of participation in communities" (Goode, 2010, p. 502) and these communities may take place online.

Nagy and Koles (2014) seek to unpack theories of digital self-representation. In their analysis of virtual identity theory, they argue that virtual contexts offer people unique opportunities to express their identity that would not be possible otherwise.

Furthermore, virtual identities may be more malleable than physical identities despite being subject to similar influences (Nagy & Koles, 2014).

Greenhow and Robelia (2009) frame social network sites as outlets for informal learning in their study exploring learner identity formation of low-income youths. They consider ways that social network site engagement supports learning and ways digital engagement facilitates identity development. They argue that identity is "dynamic, self-reflective, and performativity, rather than something that just is, or that we develop into and sustain" (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009, p. 124). For Greenhow and Robelia (2009), youths can represent their identity through social network site profile construction. Here, youths can explore, write, and rewrite various identities. As part of a larger research project, Greenhow and Robelia (2009) conducted surveys and focus groups in two cohorts of 852 participants each. Within this study, they used interviews, think alouds, and content analysis to capture experiences of students in connection with social network site content. Through this research, they found that participants engage in "self discovery" and "self presentation" within social network sites (p. 130). Furthermore, such self-presentations often include accurate information and representations that align with offline identities; however often these representations are embellished.

Exploring ways subjectivities are developed online, Davies (2013) explores ways that female hairdressers use Facebook as a gendered community. Different from Greenhow and Robelia's (2009) expansive participant samples, Davies (2013) explored ways four participants created an online community of gendered practice through a Facebook group. In analyzing their conversations, Davies (2013) found that the participants employed varying representations and discourses of femininity to suit

contexts and conversations. She further found that participants criticized other users'

digital behaviour and likewise felt they were criticized online. One participant felt that

she should delete her Facebook account to relieve anxieties of judgment and surveillance

(Davies, 2013). As such, participants could create and re-create their profile depending

on peer acceptance or rejection. Davies's (2013) research highlights the complexity of

female representation in digital contexts. Notably, Davies (2013) does not consider ways

that feminists construct and negotiate their digital identity within feminist Facebook

groups. If online spaces reflect norms, users who challenge these norms through feminist

Facebook groups may expand possibilities for gender representations. As such, further

research should consider individual experiences to uncover layers of complexity and

embedded context within digital engagement for users who work on challenging gender

norms.

Connections to Formal Education

Dabbagh and Kitsantas's (2012) theoretical article details ways personal learning

networks support both formal and informal learning. They argue that personal learning

networks allow users of social network sites to organize their knowledge, learn from

peers, and contribute to knowledge platforms. Focusing on workplace contexts, Milligan,

Littlejohn, and Margaryan (2014) argue that informal learning networks allow users to

consume knowledge, create new knowledge, connect with others, and contribute to a

network.

Seeking to understand how social network sites support community formation,

Kehus et al. (2010) developed an eWeb community of five core participants, and six

peripheral participants, which was analyzed over 6 months. In analyzing ways

participants learned how to engage in an online community, they found that users experimented with posting different content and formats, then gauged the success of their posts by interpreting ways other users responded. Furthermore, users increased their online engagement as they became more comfortable using the space (Kehus et al., 2010). McLoughlin and Lee (2010) support Kehus et al.'s (2010) findings that learning online is often self-directed.

Although most social network site learning is currently informal, McLoughlin and Lee (2010) suggest that schools should increase formal scaffolding by bridging gaps between informal and formal learning to support critical media literacies. Although research suggests that education systems should teach skills to enable "participatory pedagogy" supportive of informal learning in online contexts (McLoughlin & Lee, 2010, p. 31), research also suggests that despite potential benefits, educators should be cautious about infiltrating students' digital cultural spaces (Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009). Madge et al. (2009) argue that despite their influential context, "aggressive marketing, teaching, or pastoral interventions are not recommended" (p. 152) as it may deter users from interacting within these sites and disrupt transformative possibilities. Often, such research studies that explore personal learning networks focus on personal advancement rather than community social movement. As such, it is important to research ways that social network site engagement can be used for feminist online social movement learning.

Literature Review Conclusion

In this literature review, I discussed feminism, adult education, and Facebook. Specifically, I discussed ways post-structural feminism positions gender as discursively

constructed within a web of gendered power relations. I highlighted ways that post-structural feminism strives to critique these power relations to expand possibilities for gendered subjects. I then situated social media within the field of adult education with an emphasis on social movement learning. Finally, I discussed current research related to gender, activism, and social network sites.

Social network sites such as Facebook are an increasingly researched field of study; however, little research has explored learning experiences of feminists. Moving forward, I discuss my post-structural feminist research methodology and research methods used to explore my central research question: How do women learn feminism, represent themselves, and enact feminism within feminist Facebook groups?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I discuss feminist discourse analysis as a qualitative methodology for digital research contexts. I begin by theoretically grounding feminist discourse analysis. I do so by discussing feminist research contexts and exploring discourse analysis as a qualitative and feminist research methodology. I then discuss a feminist discourse analytic lens and draw connections between discourse analysis and social network sites. I outline my research questions and detail specific methods that I use in this research. I conclude by highlighting ethical implications of this research and argue for researcher reflexivity to maintain ethical research.

In researching women participating in feminist Facebook groups, I explore the following question: How do women learn feminism, represent themselves, and enact feminism within Facebook? Specifically, I explore:

- How do feminists learn to construct and represent their selves online?

- What gendered power relations influence users' learning of feminism on Facebook?

- How can Facebook be used as a site for learning and participating in social movements such as feminism?

To explore my research questions, I interviewed Facebook users who self-identified as feminists and conducted a digital focus group. I used feminist discourse analysis to analyze research data. As Wood and Kroger (2003) suggest, "one useful way to begin is to try to imagine all of the activities in which discourse related to the questions of interest might occur" (p. 65). As such, I began data collection by discussing the participants' broad experiences with feminism, Facebook, and learning. I then probed further when

participants discussed discursive constructions of these three broad topics and encouraged participants to speak to their experiences and interpretations of their experiences using Facebook to learn feminism.

Post-Structural Feminist Research

Post-structural feminism's emergence in the late 1970s has shaped feminist theory and opened avenues for researching gender that values multiplicity, subjectivity, and individual experience (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2009). As such, post-structural research often uses dialogic research methods, makes connections to systems of social power, and explores lived experiences (Lather, 2004). Researchers using a feminist lens often choose qualitative research methods. Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2012) argue that "methods are simply research techniques, tools that get at the research problem, whereas epistemology shapes our research questions and the theories we hold about the social world" (p. 176). Thus, epistemology frames research and influences decision making throughout the research process. Feminist standpoints and epistemologies lay under the surface, embedded within the research framework and driving choices in methodologies and methods. In this section I discuss ways in which feminism influences research, discuss discourse analysis as a research methodology, draw connections between feminism and discourse analysis, and outline implications of feminism for working within social network site research contexts.

Gendered power relations can be reflected in research (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2009). In supporting feminist political positions, feminist research often explores lived experiences and patriarchal social structures while also critiquing patriarchal influences on research contexts and methodologies (Sprague, 2005).

Post-structural approaches to feminist research rethink objectivity, pay attention to discursive strategies, consider power relations, explore situated knowledges, and maintain criticality towards binary categories (Gannon & Davies, 2012). Importantly, post-structural research does not seek to generalize lived experiences of participants but instead works to create space to hear multiple voices. Furthermore, deconstructing power relations through research can shift dominant ways of knowing. Perhaps most importantly, post-structural feminist research does not assume that there is a definitive female voice or recognizable female experience. Instead, gender, sex, and ideal bodies are socially constructed, and their discursive representations constitute and are constituted by power-knowledge relations (Butler, 1990, 1993).

Importantly, this positioning towards gender and experience troubles the gendered subject in order to shift away from "privileging experience as foundational to knowledge, or as a transparent window to the 'real' [which] denies its situatedness in discourses that constitute subjectivities in the first place" (Luke, 1992, p. 37). To unpack discursive gendered power relations, post-structural feminist research works from a position of deconstruction and critical analysis (Butler, 1995; Gannon & Davies, 2012). Additionally, post-structural feminist researchers "emphasize the ways disciplinary discourses shape how researchers see the worlds" (Naples, 2003, p. 23) and thus maintain reflexivity to explore ways in which academia and research discourses may "operate to reinsert power relations" (p. 23).

Post-Structural Feminist Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis [CDA] strives to make visible often invisible power relations embedded in symbolic orderings of society (Meyer, 2001). How CDA is taken

up can vary and thus is best understood as an "approach, which constitutes itself at different levels" (Meyer, 2001, p. 14). Approaches to CDA are often aligned with social justice objectives and operate hermeneutically: understanding interconnectivity between discourse and context (Meyer, 2001). While CDA varies depending on ways it is theoretically conceptualized, this research engages with approaches that may connect with Foucauldian post-structuralist theories of discourse.

Foucault (1977) argues power is a constructive force that creates subjectivities, meanings, and reality. Distinctions between normal and abnormal subjectivities are created through exercising power relations in particular ways (Foucault, 1977). Extending analysis of ways power relations constitute subjectivities, Butler (1993) considers implications for gender. In doing so, she considers that naming and categorizing sex and gender "contribute to that field of discourse and power that orchestrates, delimits and sustains that which qualifies as 'the human'" (Butler, 1993, p. 8). As such, discourses can operate to normalize and ab-normalize varying connections between sex and gender. In doing so, power relations may sort and hierarchize society into categories such as race, class, ability, religion, and gender. Discourses, or cultural meanings attributed to such categorizations, often construct, perpetuate, and legitimize White, capitalist, non-disabled, Christian, heteronormative, cis-gender subjects as ideal (Butler, 1999; Gore, 1992; Haraway, 1992).

> With specific consideration for feminist approaches to critical discourse analysis, the aim of feminist critical discourse studies, therefore, is to show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced,

sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities.

(Lazar, 2007, p. 142)

In approaching discourse analysis through a post-structural feminist lens, researchers can analyze power relations produced through language, actions, and actors.

In researching experiences of women using feminist Facebook groups, it is pertinent to unpack ways in which discursively maintained norms frame subjectivities and experiences. Post-structural feminist discourse analysis facilitates understanding how gender is constructed and policed through social norms and dominant discourses. Influenced by critical approaches to discourse analysis, "feminist discourse analyses critique discourses which sustain a patriarchal social order" (Lazar, 2005, p. 5). Importantly, "post-structuralist conceptions of discourse as socially constitutive signifying practices have been fruitfully combined with linguistic approaches in many CDA [critical discourse analysis] and recent gender and language studies" (Lazar, 2005, p. 11).

Post-structural feminist discourse analysis supports post-structural feminist theory in emphasizing gender as socially constructed, power relations as linguistically mediated, and subjectivities as normatively influenced. Butler (1999) argues that it is important to consider the ways that gender and sex are constructed and how binaries are reinforced when analyzing gendered discourses. Post-structural feminist discourse analysis should explore "how gender ideology and gendered relations of power are (re)produced, negotiated and contested in representations of social practices, in social relationships between people, and people's social and personal identities in texts and talk" (Butler, 1999, p. 11). Thus, post-structural feminist discourse analysis is used when analyzing a

variety of texts and focuses on how gender is constructed, policed, or challenged within these texts. Additionally, this analysis explores context in relation to experience.

This research explores experiences of feminists who learn and engage with feminism through Facebook. As Clark (2016) argues, feminist engagement online is discursive. As such, to analyze such engagement requires a discursive approach. In using a post-structural feminist approach to CDA, this research analyzes ways gendered power relations discursively operate when participants construct their digital feminist presence: from profile construction to forms of engagement.

<div align="center">**Research Ethics**</div>

As lines between public and private spaces are blurred in online contexts, social network sites pose new issues for research ethics. Considering the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Siences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Tri-Council, 2010) *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (TCPS) to address ethical concerns for digital contexts, it is important to maintain concern for participant welfare, respect for persons involved and value justice in research.

"Free, informed and ongoing consent" (Tri-Council, 2010, p. 28) is necessary when conducting ethical research. Institutionally, consent was sought by having participants sign a letter of informed consent. Before collecting data, I provided participants with a letter of invitation and a letter of informed consent. I asked them to read the documentation before agreeing to participate in this research. Before our initial interview, I verbally reviewed the content of the letter of informed consent, answered their questions regarding participation, and elaborated on research ethics procedures.

Digital spaces are constantly shifting and evolving. As such, informed consent was important to maintain concerning participation in the digital focus group. I wondered: What did participants need to know about the digital space to be able to provide true informed consent? I decided that they needed to be aware of the privacy policy of Facebook as their policies and rules around data inform the storage of data. Before their initial interview, I informed participants that while I was taking measures to ensure confidentiality of data, Facebook stores all user-posted information and data on its server. Although participants may delete posted content, Facebook may maintain backup files of data. I told participants that they should be reflective of posted content despite Facebook's privacy policy. All participants expressed that they were aware of Facebook's privacy policy and felt comfortable participating in a digital focus group.

I informed participants that participation is entirely voluntary without coercion or incentive. Participation could be stopped or withdrawn from the research project at any point. Before each interview, I reminded them of their option to stop or withdraw participation. During data collection, participants used their discretion when sharing stories and information through interviews and participation in a private focus group. I reminded participants that they did not have to respond to questions or provide information on topics with which they felt uncomfortable.

Referring to the role of researchers in maintaining confidentiality, the TCPS states that "researchers shall safeguard information entrusted to them and not misuse or wrongfully disclose it" (Tri-Council, 2010, p. 60). Safeguarding information includes considerations for data access and participant reidentification. Throughout the research process, I was concerned about cybersecurity and hacking. I audio-recorded and uploaded

interviews to a folder on my password-protected computer. To safeguard the information, I wanted my digital copies of data to be confidential within themselves. I used participant's pseudonyms in the transcriptions. With a relatively small number of participants, I could use my memory to keep track of the participants' names and pseudonyms. I titled the file names with their pseudonyms. Upon transcribing the interviews, I replaced names with pseudonyms. Following the transcriptions, the audio files were deleted from my computer and remain on my recorder memory in a locked drawer.

Because participants needed a Facebook account to participate in the focus groups, risk of re-identification was higher regarding the group data. Participants were informed of their risk for re-identification by other participants in the focus group. I informed the participants of the importance of maintaining confidentiality. Confidentiality was particularly important as some participants had met in varying social and academic capacities before engaging in the focus groups. Before assembling the focus group, I reminded participants of their role in maintaining confidentiality but also the risks to confidentiality in sharing within a group atmosphere. I told the participants that while I take measures to ensure confidentiality and minimize risks of identification, other participants in the group may know who they are, and they may know other participants. As such, we needed to respect one another by keeping personal information shared by other participants private.

I prompted conversation in the focus group that centered around topics related to feminism. As such, the participants' decision to share personal and identifiable information was at their discretion. However, participants' posts are through their

personal Facebook account which may connect to personal information. Considering

options for "technical safeguards" (Tri-Council, 2010, p. 58), I reminded participants to

consider public access to their Facebook page so that they may change their privacy

settings, remove content, or create an alternative profile before participating in the group.

All participants expressed that they were comfortable with using their existing privacy

settings and profile. Many profiles had limited personal information (such as last names,

place of residence, and birthdate) and increased privacy settings before participation in

the research project. During the intake interview, all participants expressed that they were

cognizant and critical of Facebook's privacy settings and took measures to protect their

information beyond the scope of the research.

To further consider technical safeguards, text-based focus group data was copied

into a secure password protected Word file but was not be deleted from Facebook as

participants may choose to continue engaging in the community following the research

project. Facebook offers a delete feature that allows users to remove any content that they

have contributed and an edit feature that allows users to change content that they have

contributed. As such, participants had the option to delete or change any of their content

at any point throughout the research process. I locked all print copies in a drawer and

shredded them when I was finished working with them. All direct and indirect identifying

information was removed, and I used pseudonyms. Researching a digital space meant that

connections between publicly made posts, names, and profiles, could be made and so

participants were informed that they risked re-identification (Tri-Council, 2010, p. 59).

Best efforts were made to maintain confidentiality in the dissemination of research

findings. Upon completion of data collection, I sent participants their interview

transcriptions. I asked participants to review the transcriptions and focus group postings to ensure that their data was accurate, and they were comfortable with the information that they shared. I reminded participants that they could remove or change content that they did not want used in the reporting of this research. All participants reviewed interview and focus group transcripts. While most participants were comfortable with the transcripts, one participant requested that I omit her profession and province of residence in all reporting of findings. She felt that the number of women in her field of work in her province was so small that it would be quite easy to identify her as a participant. I worked with the participant in a series of emails to develop an alternative description that she felt would not make her susceptible to reidentification. Importantly, participants only disclosed information with which they were comfortable.

Researcher Role and Reflexivity

Feminist research considers that "research is value-laden, and knowledge is always partial and contestable; that a neutral, objective researcher, interviewer/observer does not exist except in imagination" (Tilley, 2016, p. 7). Researcher–researched relationships operate within a web of power relations where researchers can occupy insider and outsider positions within a single research project as "our position within our research context is positioned and repositioned on a daily basis" (Naples, 2003, p. 49). Therefore, to address research ethics in feminist research, researchers must "decide both how to conceptualize power and what to do about power relations in your own research, including situations where the people you are studying can exercise power over you" (Naples, 2003, p. 156).

I see myself as an insider in that I am a feminist user of social network sites, an

ally in sharing a common goal with my participants, and an outsider in being a researcher. Negotiating different power relations and influences requires feminist research ethics beyond the scope of traditional research ethics policies (Tilley, 2016). Research ethics processes are important to uphold expectations and standards for ethical research. However, completing formal channels for ethics is only the start to completing ethical research. The considerations that I had for participant consent, confidentiality and representation went beyond the scope of formalized research ethics procedures. Unlike other research experiences (where my participants' only relationship with me was through the research data collection) in using snowball sampling, the participants in this research had preexisting relationships with me or with a friend of mine. Critical reflexivity and maintaining a researcher journal became particularly important while navigating these relationships and collecting data. Through this process, I began to consider a post-structural feminist ethic of friendship and care. Feminist research ethics extend beyond procedure but infiltrate all components of research including methods and interpretations of findings (DeVault & Gross, 2012, p. 225).

Considering friendship as method, Tillmann-Healy (2003) argues that an ethic of friendship is "a stance of hope, caring, justice, even love" (p. 735). Initially beginning this research, I felt uncomfortable researching my "friends." I felt protective of the ways that they were represented and conflicted as to whether I would be able to paint an "objective" picture of their story. I now understand the pull towards objectivity as being a quantitative reflex. Research is subjective, and the care experienced in friendship is important to uphold for all participants. I am accountable to my participants who I care for as friends. Their interviews are more than data but stories and experiences that should be shared with honour and respect.

Feminist research is concerned with whose voices are heard and how they are presented (Olesen, 2005). Additionally, it is important in feminist research to "make women's voices heard without exploiting or distorting those voices" (Olesen, 2005, p. 252). While my experiences have inspired my research, it is important to continually reflect upon my standpoint to understand and represent voices of other feminists who use Facebook for learning about feminism and activism. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that journaling is important to determine "the extent to which the inquirers' biases influenced the outcomes" (p. 327); therefore, as a means of maintaining reflexivity I kept a researcher journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This journal was reflective, in that it recounted my experiences, but reflexive in that it maintained a critical stance that considered ways my epistemological standpoint influenced my methodological processes (Naples, 2003).

Working with "friends" was an important exercise in ensuring respectful research methods and representation. For example, reading and interpreting transcripts required multiple readings to ensure that I understood, as accurately as possible, their intended meaning. Writing my analysis of these transcripts required that I apply my theoretical framework and critically analyze ways my own standpoint's agreement or disagreement influenced my understanding of the data. I considered if my interpretation or representation of data allowed my voice to speak louder than the participants, and, if so, why? I asked myself: How did my positionality influence perspectives? How would the participant feel reading this? Did I represent them in a way that they felt was accurate? These questions highlighted the importance of considering the participants' positionality. For all participants, especially those who I did not know prior to this research, I needed to

understand context so that I could understand their perspectives on the research topic. Representing voices came with tremendous responsibility. Thus, working with "friends" further challenged me to deeply consider feminist ethics, reflexivity, and friendship throughout all elements of this research.

Facebook as a Site for Data Collection

Engagement on Facebook has two essential constructed spaces needed to engage online: a profile and a wall. To engage online requires that, first, the participants create a digital profile and, second, the participants interact with other users through walls, messages, and groups.

The Profile: Self-Construction

Facebook (2019b) outlines its fundamental service stating that "people should be able to use Facebook for free to establish a presence, connect with others, and share information with them" (Item 7., para. 1). Facebook's main feature is the profile page where users "establish a presence" by choosing, constructing, manipulating, and presenting images, words, videos, and music to develop a self-representation in a user profile. Users can only interact within Facebook through their profile. Without a profile, Internet users can view public information but may not participate in digital discussions or communicate with other users. Facebook creators design the layout of profiles. The website prompts users to share information about themselves including, but not limited to, a profile self-image, full name, gender, age, residence, career, educational history, photo albums, home videos, personal interests (sports, books, television, film), religious views, status updates, and political standpoints. Once a profile is created, users may build connections with other user profiles through constructing a "friends" list. When searching

for potential friends through Facebook's search engine, users can request connections that must then be accepted by the receiving user.

Walls, Messaging, and Groups: Spaces for Communication

Sharing of information through Facebook is primarily done on walls, groups, and messaging. The Facebook wall is an element of the profile where "friends" or social connections can post comments. Users can then respond to the comments or post on their "friends'" walls. Postings on walls are semi-public. They are visible to other users and engage a variety of users depending on how one has set one's privacy settings. Therefore, the users can manage content posted on and access to their profile. Users can engage in private messages through Facebook's instant messaging and email service. Through this service, users can send individual or mass messages that they do not wish to make public. They can also choose users whom they would like to include in conversations. Finally, groups are third-party sites where users can create a webspace separate from individual profiles to share information and engage in conversations. Groups can be public or private depending on the desired scope of engagement. Although any user can post in a public group, users must request access and be accepted as members by the group creator to participate in a private group.

Recruitment

In this research, I used snowball sampling to recruit nine Facebook users who identified as feminists and participated in feminism using Facebook. I sent all my Facebook "friends" a recruitment letter that was passed on to any friends that they felt may be suitable for participation. All respondents were asked to first engage in face-to-face, Skype, or Facebook messenger interviews. Participants then joined a private

Facebook group where they discussed participant and researcher determined feminist issues. Their participation concluded with an exit interview. All nine participants partook in intake interviews, five participated in a digital focus group, and eight participated in exit interviews.

Methods: Data Collection

Before any data collection or analysis, I sent out letters of invitation and letters of consent to all potential participants. Data collection took place in three stages. First, I recruited nine participants who engaged in an intake interview. Second, I invited participants to engage in an online focus group discussion. Third, I invited participants to engage in an exit interview. All stages of data collection were analyzed using post-structural feminist discourse analysis (Butler, 1999; Lazar, 2005).

Initial Interviews

Each participant partook in one of two interview formats: Face-to-face and Skype. All interviews were open-ended qualitative interviews (DeVault & Gross, 2012) that were guided by a list of predetermined interview questions to initiate conversations. Content addressed participants' engagement and learning with Facebook, engagement and learning with feminism, ways they use Facebook to learn about and engage with Feminism, constructing a digital profile, and engaging with online material offline (see Appendix A: Interview Guide). Such conversations diverged from the interview questions so that the researcher could further inquire into participant-initiated topics such as self-critiques of their experiences learning feminism. I conducted initial interviews before initiating the focus group and took 1.5 to 2 hours per interview.

Focus Group Discussion

During intake interviews, I informed participants that there would be an optional focus group where they were encouraged to discuss topics related to feminism and Facebook. All participants expressed their interest in participating in the focus group, and I added them to a researcher-created online Facebook focus "group"; however, only seven actively participated. Of the two who did not, one had technical difficulties joining the group due to her privacy settings, and one "took a break" from Facebook. The Facebook focus group was private, meaning that only invited users of the group may view the conversations within it. Furthermore, participation in this group did not mean that users had access to each other's private Facebook information.

Focus groups can allow for participants to engage in conversations with one another that may uncover or reaffirm discourses related to gender and digital spaces. Depending on the intention of the focus group, they can serve pedagogical, political, and research purposes (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Importantly, through conversation between participants, and problem-posing by researchers, focus groups can be used as sites for learning. Meanwhile, such conversations may also support feminist objectives and thus, political purposes by supporting and developing a collective voice amongst women. Finally, as a research method, focus groups allow researchers to learn from multiple perspectives and group conversations that may change or further research objectives (Kamerelis & Dimitriadis, 2005).

Perhaps most important to this research is the political objective of focus groups. As Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) argue, "as a form of collective testimony, focus group participation has often been empowering for women…. [as they] decenter the

authority of the researcher, providing women with safe spaces to talk about their own lives and struggles…. [and] allow women to connect with each other collectively" (p. 893). The creation of and critical dialogue within the focus group will "constitute spaces for generating collective 'testimonies,' and these testimonies help both individual women and groups of women to find or produce their own unique and powerful 'voices'" (Kamberelis & Dimitridas, 2005, p. 893).

To begin the conversation, I introduced myself, my interest in feminism and Facebook, and expressed my excitement for the focus group. I asked the participants to introduce themselves, asked them to choose what images should be used to represent the group, and asked: "What are qualities of good Facebook groups?" While all participants introduced themselves, none contributed ideas to images for the Facebook groups, and none suggested qualities of good Facebook groups. Instead, the participants began freely sharing articles that interested them about current events related to feminism. Participants generated the shared information within the group, liked posts by other group members, and provided feedback. As a researcher-facilitator, I either liked or posted on every post as an indicator that I engaged with their discussion—a digital form of active listening. To facilitate conversations, I posted discussion questions or current events during periods of inactivity that reflected current debates in online feminism (see Appendix B: Focus Group Question Guide).

Participants engaged as frequently as they choose over three months. I extended the time frame of participation from 2 months to 3 months based on the quantity and quality of the participants' discussion. Extending the time frame allowed participants to engage in many conversations that addressed the focus group research questions. The

focus group concluded as researcher facilitated conversation and engagement with the group became less frequent, and participants ceased responding.

Exit Interviews

Exit interviews took place immediately following focus group discussion. Seven participants partook in exit interviews. I began the exit interview by recalling some of the initial interview questions and asked participants if there were any notable changes in their experiences. I also asked them if they had experienced social media differently since beginning the research. By asking these questions, I probed into emergent themes across interviews, asking participants to expand on discussion points from our initial interviews and focus group discussion (see Appendix C: Exit Interview Guide). For example, I asked participants to reflect on their experiences in the focus group and drew connections to their prior experiences with Facebook groups.

Data Analysis

I transcribed all voice interviews verbatim. I uploaded all transcriptions to NVivo, read through them and read through for emergent themes. The initial themes I found were: online forms of learning, diversity in feminism, online self-construction, Facebook tools as forms of online feminist support, online silencing, and blending of online–offline spaces. I organized the participants' data into a chart using the emergent themes as titles. As I rearranged the data, I began to consider ways discourse and power relations influenced the participants' experiences with these themes. I began to look for tensions and negotiations within the themes. I also began to ask questions of the participants' experiences with the themes. For example, the category of "online forms of learning" included all instances where the participants discussed online learning. However, as I

analyzed this category, I started to question "what power relations influenced ways participants learned online?" and "what tensions or negotiations did the participants experience in their online learning?" In asking critical questions related to discourse, I began to re-code and critically analyze the data. I further found that some of my previous content-based themes no longer fit with the framing of my research questions.

I wanted to know how the participants viewed these themes, and what tensions or negotiations took place when participants discussed their experiences. I re-read the highlighted and organized data for ways the participants described their experiences with these topics, ways participants related to each other's experiences with these topics, and ways participants' experiences reflected post-structural feminist conceptualizations of gendered power relations. After the first set of coding, I revisited my literature review and reconsidered my theoretical framework based on how participants were speaking about gendered power-relations and digital censorship.

I first analyzed ways that the participants construct and represent their online subjectivity. In this, I grouped data into broad themes around learning, gender, and feminism. Data that fit these themes were then reanalyzed to focus more specifically on discursive learning feminism on Facebook, gender construction and representation, and perceived gendered power relations that influence their engagement and learning in feminist Facebook groups. The initial interviews uncovered ways that the participants understood feminism to be constituted, enacted, and supported when engaging online. In this way, I analyzed discourses around the participants' online learning and interaction.

To include elements of social networking media within social networking site research and tenets of discourse analysis interviews, seven of the nine participants

partook in at least one interview using digital technology through voice or video focused interviews through Skype. Holding both face-to-face interviews reflected current social realities of blurred offline and online boundaries and mitigated logistical barriers such as travel and time costs for participants.

Participants

Nine females currently residing in Canada participated in this study. Darla, Alana, and Lena chose their pseudonyms while Nina, Diana, Kara, Natalia, Carol, and Emma elected to have researcher-assigned pseudonyms. The participants were asked to describe themselves. They were not asked to identify specific demographic information, such as sex or race. Instead, they were prompted to share the information that they felt best described them. All shared their ages or approximation of age, their current place of residence, their educational experience, and their careers. Lena shared that her cultural background was Italian, and Natalia shared that her cultural background was Romanian. Darla, Alana, Lena, Natalia, and Kara were in their late 20s, Emma and Nina were in their mid-30s, Diana was in her late 40s, and Carol was in her late 50s. All participants were Canadian educated women who currently live in Canada. Participants' profiles were constructed using as much of their descriptors as possible. What the participant deemed to be important determined what information was included in the descriptions.

Participant 1: Nina

Nina is a female in her mid-30s. She was "born and raised in Ontario and has since moved" to farther north (Focus group introduction) with her husband. Nina's self-description predominantly focused on her career. However, she often discusses ways that her feminist standpoint influences her perspective and inspires her to work towards

"positive equality" (Intake interview). She identifies as a feminist and credits her initial interest in feminist theory to her college courses. These courses helped her grow as "an advocate for marginalized persons" and "advocate for positive change" (Intake interview). She has "accessed informal education and life experience throughout Canada, the USA, Europe, and Africa while being formally educated in Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta" (Focus group introduction). Nina frequently follows and contributes to Facebook groups and uses Facebook to connect with "like-minded professionals" (Intake interview). She works in community programming and is "a proud founder and operator of a global practice mostly carried out in partnership thanks to word of mouth and technologies. Its specialties include people and organization centered human, program, and community development projects" (Focus group introduction).

Participant 2: Alana

Alana is a female in her late 20s. She was "born and raised" (Focus group introduction) in Ontario and currently lives in Manitoba. Alana "went to a Canadian university for [her] BA/BEd and MEd" and upon graduating, "moved to Manitoba for work" (Focus group introduction). Alana is "extremely passionate about education and the right to education" and describes her personality as "opinionated and critical" (Intake interview). Alana describes her experience completing her Master of Education program as transformative and a time that "helped me understand a lot of who I am" (Intake interview). During her MEd, Alana worked as an educational research assistant. This role sharpened her analytical skills and pushed her to think critically about social justice. Currently, Alana works "with students to help them develop the skills and strategies necessary for success in college" as well as "some disability services." She also teaches part-time "for another institution via distance delivery." Alana's experience moving from

a "liberal culture [and] bigger city" (Intake interview) in Southern Ontario to a "conservative community" (Intake interview) in Manitoba has been challenging but has "pushed [her] thinking… to really understand what [she] believes" (Intake interview).

Participant 3: Diana

Diana is a female in her early 50s. She is an "athlete, teacher, researcher" (Diana, Intake interview). For Diana, the order of her self-description is important because her athletic background led her to pursue a teaching career. Her teaching pursued her to continue her Masters and PhD. Although she has been an academic for 8 years, she misses teaching in a public classroom. She doesn't "fit into society's constructs" related to gender. She attributes this to her home life as she "grew up with two mothers and therefore did not experience patriarchy at home" (Focus group introduction). Diana believes that her unique upbringing leads her to be self-reliant and maintain financial independence. Furthermore, she experienced difficulty relating to females when discussing feminine beauty standards. In reflecting on her experiences, she believes that her colleagues and peers may have judged her lack of adherence to gendered beauty norms. She also identifies as someone who speaks her mind. As a subject of an anonymous survey taken in a course, she found that the eight female respondents perceived her to be "strong, assertive, outgoing, and confident" whereas the three male respondents saw her as "naïve" (Intake interview). She felt that these results were in reaction to her optimistic belief that gender equality is possible.

Participant 4: Kara

Kara is a female adult educator in her early 30s from Alberta who believes her career, learning, and family have shaped her lived experiences. Kara describes her family and boyfriend as being supportive. She believes that she is "a product of all the areas

where [she] put[s] [her] time" (Intake interview). In other words, she has taken an active role in shaping her subjectivity through her dedication to her career, learning, and relationship. She explains that she grew up in a privileged socio-economic position and did not experience inequality first hand until she entered the corporate world. Upon beginning her work experience in a male-dominated field, Kara received many comment s about her body by her male colleagues. While she initially felt flattered by the attention over time, she began feeling that she wasn't taken seriously and was viewed as "childish" and "a thing to look at" (Intake interview). Kara has started to grow more confidence and knowledge that has supported her ability to push back against sexism. She now teaches in an accounting program at a local college. She is completing a doctorate in Canada and participates in triathlons.

Participant 5: Emma

Emma is a female in her mid-30s. She lives "in Nova Scotia where [she] was born and raised" and has "left several times, living in Toronto and England, but [kept] coming back to the East coast" (Focus group introduction). She describes herself as a "teacher, educator… feminist… daughter, sister, partner, step-mom, [and] activist" (Intake interview). She identifies as coming from "a long line of independent women" (Intake interview) who have helped shape her understanding of feminism. She has "a BA from a [Canadian] University, a BEd from [an American] University, an MEd in Lifelong Learning from [a Canadian University], and [is] currently in [a] PhD program" (Focus group introduction). She attributes her experiences attending a traditionally women's university to prompting her curiosity about gender inequality. Emma noticed that, despite women being the predominant demographic, men were most frequently in senior administrative positions. This observation inspired Emma's research interests which led

her to study supports and barriers for mothers in academia. Currently, Emma is a "contract faculty [member] and teach[es] a grad seminar" (Focus group introduction). She also volunteers "with a women's shelter and also with a women's foundation" (focus group introduction).

Participant 6: Natalia

Natalia is a female in her late 20s who was born in southeastern Europe. She moved to Austria when [she] was 4 [and] was raised by [her] grandparents" (Intake interview). She came to Canada to live with her parents when she was young but returned to her birth country every summer during her teen years. As a child, she attended an all-girls Catholic high school which inspired her to pursue a women's studies degree. She felt that the all-girls school supported a sisterhood that co-ed schools did not support. Natalia attended an Ontario university for her bachelor's degree where she began studying women's studies but switched to anthropology. She "really want[s] to be a teacher" (Intake interview) and spent 3 years applying to programs. She is currently completing a Bachelor of Education program at an Ontario University. She describes herself as "a person that just likes to share love," is "openminded," and is "interested in taking care of everyone else as well as [herself]" (Intake interview).

Participant 7: Carol

Carol is a female in her late 50s who is from Southern Ontario. She is "a stay at home worker" (Focus group introduction) and a mother. She is a self-directed lifelong learner who likes to stay busy by learning through reading and the Internet. She understands herself through "life experiences, educating through... reading [or] being an observer…[of] people or situations" (Intake interview). Carol does not cite formal

learning as a space where she has learned about the world. Instead, she "educates [herself]" and is "always trying to learn something new in anything [she] can. It's mostly self-propelled" (Intake interview). She explained that her understanding of her subjectivity was shaped by one of her children's passing which lead her to observe people and situations with more empathy. For Carol, this experience was a "big change and shift" in how she perceives and experiences stress. For Carol, growing up during the 1970s feminism, having a strong mother, and having a supportive father, has strengthened her resolve to fight for women's rights. She identifies as a feminist what has influenced her decisions when raising her son and daughter.

Participant 8: Darla

Darla is a female in her late 20s from Southern Ontario. She "completed a BA from a Canadian university and an MA from an American university" (Focus group introduction). Following her Master's, she left her career path to pursue a career where she could positively impact lives. She moved back to Ontario where discovered a gap in social services for young adults with disabilities. She "spearhead[ed] a program for young adults [with developmental disabilities] that is premised on the belief that learning occurs when people have the opportunity to be engaged in their community, active and having fun" (Focus group introduction). While work is an important influence on her life, she also "volunteer[s] with an NGO, practice[es] yoga, [and] run[s]" (Focus group introduction). As a middle child in a family with three girls, Darla's family was an impactful influence in her life. Her initial feminist influence came from her experiences attending a Catholic high school where she took an alternative English literature course.

This course encouraged her to explore intersections of oppression and included critical content that was not typical of her catholic educational experiences.

Participant 9: Lena

Lena is a female in her late 20s. She is the oldest child and has one younger sister with whom she has a close relationship. She "was born in Southern Ontario" (Focus group introduction) and identifies as the "only Italian person in a very white community" where she experienced anti-Italian sentiments by peers (Intake interview). She grew up trying to emulate her father to avoid falling into female Italian stereotypes but has evolved over the last ten years and now perceives herself differently. She feels that she is now more critical of herself and has found her passion in teaching adults. Lena "currently work[s] as a senior English teacher at an adult high school" (Focus group introduction). She was inspired to become a teacher after having positive experiences in high school English class. She is a first-generation university student which she describes as feeling "like it's really big shoes to fill" (Intake interview). She has completed "a BA and BEd [and is] currently completing [her] MEd all at the same university" (Focus group introduction).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I first discuss the five major discursive themes that emerged from data analysis. These findings discuss ways discourses related to gender are learned and produced. They discuss ways that such discourses influence ways feminism is learned and enacted through Facebook. These five themes include:

1. Learning feminism: This section is an exploration of ways the participants view experiences of learning feminism through feminist discourses before their engagement with Facebook. I discuss ways discourses were learned, reproduced, and challenged through formal education and popular media. Findings in this section lay a discursive context for feminist digital engagement and feminist standpoints.

2. Learning and participating on Facebook: This section considers ways the participants utilize Facebook as a space for learning about feminism. It highlights ways learning and participation are connected in this user-constructed space. It considers ways participants produce and consume feminist discourses online and ways Facebook's infrastructure influences discursive production and consumption. It considers the possibilities, limitations, and interpretations of Facebook's features as a platform for informal learning.

3. Digital self-construction: This section considers interactions between gendered social contexts and digital representations. It considers ways that gendered discourses influence how identities are negotiated, produced, and represented.

4. Shifting practices online: This section considers ways participants engage with Facebook as feminism while negotiating power relations. It considers ways they

manipulate their engagement and the parameters of their Facebook page to safely

participate online.

5. Building community: This section discusses the participants' experiences

    participating in a feminist Facebook group. It explores the participants' perceived

    differences in participating in a closed, feminist specific group, in comparison

    with their Facebook profile and offline social lives.

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Learning Feminism: Learning Positionality

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In this section, I discuss ways participants developed their understanding of

feminism. Participants' notions of feminism are varied and partial, understood in relation

to their positionalities and influenced by their lived experiences. As Haraway (1991)

argues, feminism may be "attuned to specific historical and political positionings and

permanent partialities without abandoning the search for potent connections" (p. 1). As

such, gendered power relations can be shifted and challenged through connections

between diverse feminists and feminist positionalities. In this section, I discuss ways

participants negotiated and navigated varying feminist discourses to identify as a

feminist. Participants discussed feminist discourses within their formal and informal

education. They made connections between education and media as sites where diverse

feminist discourses are learned, reinforced, and challenged.

Defining Feminism

In their descriptions, participants spoke of multiple ways feminism can be

represented and enacted. When asked to describe a feminist, participants considered who

can be a feminist and called into question notions of essentialized female experiences and

men's roles in feminist advocacy. Diana, Emma, and Alana argued that feminism is not

contingent on stable gender categories, with Diana stating "it can be anybody. It can be male, female; it can be anyone" (Intake interview). Alana stated, "a feminist can be male, female, any gender" (Intake interview), and Emma stated, "a feminist is someone who believes in equal rights and opportunities regardless of gender" (Intake interview).

Furthermore, according to the participants, feminists do not necessarily need to ascribe to a theoretical framework or defined group. The participants recognize different "types" (Diana, Intake interview) and "waves" (Natalia, Intake interview) of feminists but do not align with a specific feminist viewpoint. Instead, the participants' understanding of self as feminist is in alignment with post-structural feminisms' skepticism of "usness" (Ellsworth, 1992, p. 107). For example, Diana states, "I know there's different waves of feminism. I don't ascribe to any one particular wave, but I don't have a stereotypical vision of what a feminist looks like until I talk to somebody and in conversation, it will emerge whether you're a feminist or not" (Intake interview). Feminism should thus "emerge" and be open to flexibility rather than fixed and "stereotypical." Similarly, Lena's understanding of feminism has broadened beyond a stable category; she states that her understanding of feminism "has evolved. I don't see it as such an angry strong separate category from everybody else" (Intake interview). Natalia recognizes the different "types" of feminism but values the actions over the theoretical categorization; she states, "there's so many different types of feminism you know?... The question is: how does a feminist act?... It's just your way of being I suppose because from that mindset you just act" (Intake interview). As such, the participants do not need to adhere to a "wave," "category," or "type" of feminist to be considered a feminist.

Although the participants are aware of multiple "types" of feminists, they call for a broader understanding that is rooted in equality and calls for action. While all participants believe that feminists recognize inequality, this recognition does not simply sit within liberal-humanist conceptualizations of feminism. Instead, the notion of equality was the central uniting feature of diverse standpoints towards feminism. For example, supporting equality is what initially drew Nina towards feminism:

> I really resonated with feminism as a theory and a tool to allow change and equality for all persons. So, all persons in my world means all different genders, races, peoples, across religions, different age groups… and even the marginalized persons that exist within those kinds of groups. So, for me, feminism is a way to advocate for positive change and positive equality for all persons. (Intake interview)

For Nina, feminism is more than a perspective or view of the world but a "tool" and a "way to advocate." As such, it reflects Natalia's emphasis on feminism as one's mindset and behaviour.

Similarly, Kara highlights the importance of actions and change that can come from a feminist standpoint.

> I would see a feminist as someone who is looking for equality for women so… equal opportunities for women as well as for men. Working towards achieving that and creating… an awareness of inequalities… then actively taking the steps to make changes as well. (Intake interview)

For Kara, like the other participants, it is important to have "an awareness" and from there, "actively tak[e] the steps." These steps, however, may include seemingly small points of critique and challenge.

Darla and Alana highlight the subtle forms that feminist action may take with both participants stating the importance of critique for change. Darla states that a feminist "advocates for gender equality, looks deeper beyond face value of things in the media, challenges the way things are presented through any sort of medium out there" (Intake interview). In this, Darla emphasizes ways feminism can support discursive activism (Shaw, 2016). Unpacking power relations in media or otherwise "critique" can work to dismantle taken for granted gendered discourses. Similarly, Alana outlines how critique operates within feminism; she states, "there's a lot of people that understand that and perpetuate it, I think it's understanding and wanting to see that change... [It's] seeing it, acknowledging it, being critical of it, [and] there's wanting to see that change" (Alana, Intake interview).

Perhaps uniquely, Carol's understanding of feminism evolved through her experiences with the feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s. She outlines how feminism has changed since the 1970s:

> Back then oh my gosh we were loud about it... I think it was a good thing... to be loud and [like] hey this is it, this is how we are, this is changing. ... It might scare a few people and it might have put a bad thing on feminism but it didn't really matter. (Intake interview)

Carol thus identifies the feminists of the past as being "loud" and vocal for change. However, she also states her uncertainty of whether this was the best approach for change because she fears that it deterred people from becoming feminists. Nonetheless, Carol attributes this loudness to a strong desire for change; she states, "we had a lot of changes we thought we were going to make and one of those changes was how people thought of women" (Intake interview).

While Carol outlines the objectives of the 1970s feminist movement, she argues that more work must be done today, stating "it's changed, but there are a lot of areas that haven't changed" (Intake interview). Striving for continued change, Carol still thinks of herself as that loud feminist but explains that, for her, feminism is "just part of who I am living every day" (Intake interview). Reflecting the importance of discursive activism discussed by Darla and Alana, Carol sees feminism as taking place in everyday actions and challenges to discourses. For example, upon hearing her daughter's friend experienced sexual harassment, Carol suggests "I said I hope she turned around and told him. Like I'm always saying something like that, don't let anybody say stuff to you" (Intake interview). She further explains that she challenges sexism in everyday experiences and cites an example of challenging a professor's choice of a course reading where the central character "was rude to the women" (Carol, Intake interview). She explains "I read the first chapter and went back to the professor and said I can't read this; I just can't read this... because it's just too crass" (Carol, Intake interview).

For Carol, along with the other participants, feminism does not require a singular standpoint or grand gesture but can take place in everyday acts that reflect Fraser and Nicolson's (1989) conceptualization of post-structural feminism as a "patchwork of overlapping alliances" (p. 102). For the participants, these alliances centralize around the broad category of gender equality. This broad understanding of feminism allows space for Fraser and Nicholson's (1989) feminist "patchwork." The participants may not ascribe to a definable feminist theory, but rather work from their situatedness to challenge gender inequalities in their lives. This emphasis on feminist critique and behaviour

reflects Connell and Pearse's (2015) argument that post-structural approaches critique

and resignify oppressive gendered discourses evident in everyday life.

Confronting Environments of Feminist Misconceptions: Media and the Bra

Burners

When asked to describe feminists, participants responded by discussing dominant

representations and misconceptions of feminism in popular culture. Participants agreed

that media represented feminists as radical or extremist. These representations were not

an accurate representation of feminism that was relevant to their lives. Such

misconceptions of feminism were tied with gendered discourses that "are representations

of practices from particular perspectives in the interest of maintaining unequal power

relations and dominance" (Lazar, 2005, p. 7). Participants agreed that "angry," "radical,"

and "man-hating" feminists were popular, albeit narrow and often negative

representations, of feminism. Misconceptions of feminism influenced ways participants

understood feminism and, at times, deferred participants from identifying with and

advocating for feminism. As such, disparaging feminist discourses perpetuated feminist

backlash that discursively frames feminism as hostile, oppositional, and even detrimental

to society (Walby, 2011).

For Carol, discourses of feminism became popularized and gained public

visibility in the 1960s and 1970s through activists protesting for equal rights which she

refers to as being a "burn your bra kind of thing" (Intake interview). Images of bra-

burning have withstood over time but have come to represent feminism as part of

negative and irrational discourses aimed at suppressing feminist beliefs (Walby, 2011.

Similarly, Nina and Natalia discuss ways the media has discursively perpetuated negative

associations of feminists as "bra burners." Discussing the role of television shows in generating problematic discourses, Nina states:

> Even the Simpsons, for example, made fun of feminists, like angry feminists saying you know it's just pro everything women, the burning of the bras. The reckless behaviour feminist women have been an example of something that I've observed and paid attention to growing up. (Intake interview)

Nina's initial impressions of feminism have been through popular culture artefacts which show feminists as "angry," "reckless," "pro everything women." This representation has undermined the credibility and likeability of feminism and has instead framed it as a subject of ridicule.

Similarly, Natalia states that there are singular negative representations of feminism "whenever you see any type of political rally or any type of activism happen and the media covers it… they pick out the violent parts, the negative parts, the really extreme parts, and they're always talking to the least educated" (Intake interview). Because of these limited representations of feminists, "the media takes that [one example] or people take that [one example] and are like all feminists are man-haters or all feminists are evil" (Natalia, Intake interview). For Nina and Natalia, the way media constructs feminism in negative and extremist ways influences how some women may understand feminism. Such constructions of feminism reflect undesirable and even dangerous qualities such as violence and anger.

The participants further discuss ways comedic and undesirable representations promoted through media delegitimize feminism (Walby, 2011). Such problematic and delegitimizing discourses of marginalized communities such as women can negatively

impact lived experiences (Feltwell et al., 2017). Nina highlights ways discourses promoted in media influenced her perception of feminism; she states that growing up, she experienced "Men poking fun at people who believe in feminism [and] identify as feminists. [They would be] making jokes about them being too radical or... not in touch with how the world actually works" (Intake interview). She further states that, like men, "women themselves [said] that they just don't like how radical feminists are, there should be more order to women's behaviour" because they were associated with "erratic, unruly, behaviour" (Intake interview). Discourses of women as "not in touch with the world" and "erratic" or "unruly" disparage women who counter dominant discourses that idealize complicit, agreeable, domestic femininity (Connell & Pearse, 2015). These same discourses that align femininity with domesticity further work to undermine female engagement in political conversation (Daniels, 2012). Discourses thus construct feminists in ways that delegitimize their social action as being reckless and unnecessary.

Delegitimizing discourses are sustained to uphold patriarchal systems of power (Butler, 1999). In doing so, such representations lead to feminism not being taken seriously for fear that women may gain more power than men. As Kara states,

> I think there are very few people who see feminism as a way, as creating
> awareness for equality. ... When you mention the word feminism, it goes to the
> opposite side of the pendulum and all of a sudden, it's like women's rights above
> men's rights. (Intake interview)

Like Nina, Kara finds that extreme and misconstrued perceptions of feminism interfere with people's willingness and ability to understand and support feminism. Kara worries about ways extremist representations of feminism may dissuade people from advocating

for systemic change. Reflecting on her evolving understanding of feminism, Lena has reclaimed and reframed negative feminist discourses as an alternative to accepting docile femininity:

> Ten years ago, if someone were to say to me, you're a feminist I would have thought of the bra-burning, angry woman, kind of thing, who's always got to put in their two cents or whatever. Which isn't bad. But it's a terrible way to look at strong women I think... I'd rather be seen as an angry bra-burning female than as someone who is just walking along accepting stereotypes. (Intake interview)

Lena rejects victimization and believes that discourses of radical feminism are more empowering than docile, complicit, discourses of femininity. However, public discourses of angry or aggressive feminism may dissuade some women from concrete political action for fear of being labeled in a negative context. Such tactics of discourse legitimize regimes of power that encourage women to be passive victims rather than agent social actors (McRobbie, 2009).

The participants' discussion of "man-hating" "bra-burning" representations of feminists demonstrates ways discourses impact feminist standpoints and lived experiences. As Connell and Pearse (2015) argue, patriarchal gender orders are not upheld through formalized campaigns, but rather through "everyday sexist practice, e.g. the media's trivialization and sexualization of women" (p. 90). These everyday sexist practices connect with negative feminist discourses identified by the participants. Patriarchal femininity discursively frames women as incompetent and helpless (Connell, 2005). Popular discourses frame feminists as unlikely to marry, likely to divorce, risk infertility, or compromise their mental health to maintain patriarchal femininity (Walby, 2011). Walby (2011) argues that these discourses seek to "re-domesticate women" (p. 15).

The participants' discussion of their experiences navigating anti-feminist discourses highlights barriers to feminist engagement. Importantly, "by failing to create a mass-based educational movement to teach everyone about feminism we allow mainstream mass media to remain the primary place where folks learn about feminism, and most of what they learn is negative" (hooks, 2000a, p. 23). Furthermore, discourses that frame popular conceptions of feminism for the participants are grounded in negative, binary, gender conceptualizations that uphold femininity as passive and kind rather than "angry" and "erratic." Such misconceptions of feminism maintain gendered power relations that operate "in the interest of maintaining unequal power relations and dominance" (Lazar, 2005, p. 7).

Absences and Instances of Feminist Thought: Feminism in Formal Education

The participants believed formal education should teach feminism. However, feminism was rarely fore fronted in their courses and lessons. Furthermore, feminism or women's studies courses were absent or marginalized within the education systems that the participants experienced. Instead, feminism emerged in subtle yet meaningful ways. Participants discussed learning feminism through a single lesson in a philosophy course (Kara), an option for a term paper (Lena), or a module in an education course (Alana).

Darla found that she developed her initial interest in feminism through her Grade 10 English literature course that "had to do with challenging different beliefs" (Intake interview). Although the course topic was broad, "one [unit] was on feminism" (Darla, Intake interview). Darla reflects on her experience, stating "I think that course started out as a catalyst of making me aware of different issues that there are around the world with gender roles and gender inequality, I think it was amplified my interests in humanitarian

work" (Intake interview). Darla refers to a feminist unit as a "catalyst" or starting point that "amplified" her interests. For Darla, feminism was only a small part of the formal curriculum. Despite its minor representation in her formal education, this small experience inspired a curiosity to learn more about feminism informally. For Darla, this informal learning took place through humanitarian work.

Lena also developed understandings of feminist indirectly through her English literature assignments. Unlike structured learning as experienced by Darla, Lena self-explored topics related to feminism within her English literature courses in university:

> I realized I was such a feminist by like definition [by] going through English. My papers always had such a feminist approach to them, I always wrote about the body or… how this character was subjugated and everything was from that angle and that's how I realized that I had such a strong inclination towards supporting women. (Intake interview)

Although Lena did not take a course on feminism or women's studies, her understanding and learning about feminism emerged incidentally through other courses that she had taken in university. For Lena, when given a choice in assignment topics, she often chose to explore gender. Lena explains that she began to view her papers as being feminist papers years later. She developed feminist learning without awareness or formal direction.

For Alana, feminism was underrepresented in formal education contexts. Schools positioned feminism as an elective or an optional topic rather than a centralized, significant theoretical framework. Upon beginning her Master's, Alana chose to take courses on feminism; she explains that "I was at a point where I was starting to think a lot more critically about things... of really thinking about the media and life and personal

situations and really applying those [feminist] models" (Intake interview). Upon accessing feminist theory, and taking an interest in it, Alana began to create connections between school, life, and feminism. Feminist learning was sought out and developed outside of formal education. As a research assistant, she furthered her engagement with feminism. She states, "Looking at gender through a research perspective exposed me to the literature and exposed me to looking at how you can apply that practice, so I think a lot of learning happened there and that's where the praxis arose" (Alana, Intake interview).

Although Darla, Lena, and Alana viewed their experiences as being positive, Emma describes the lack of feminist representation in formal education as being "sad":

I really thought of feminism as a term when I was in my Master's program. Which I think is kind of sad actually, that I didn't think of it in that way until then. And then through my work with my supervisor, who… does a lot of feminist work so that was kind of my eye-opening you know, putting a name to the actual practice of feminism and I read a lot of feminist texts so that's how I'm kind of trying to expand my knowledge of Feminism. (Intake interview)

Like Lena and Alana, Emma did not learn about feminism until late in her academic career. Broadly, in her education, feminism was not present. Instead, like Darla, the work of a single educator inspired her to consider feminist thought. Importantly, the marginalization of feminism within higher education reflects gendered power relations embedded in education. Feminist content was an anomaly and often present only as an option or introduced by a sole educator. They demonstrate ways formal and informal learning are interconnected and the impact informal education can have within formal education (Peeters, De Backer, Buffel, & Kindekens, 2014). Although the participants had minimal exposure to feminism in formal education, they still cited these experiences

as shaping their feminist perspective. In this way, the participants highlight Peeters et al.'s (2014) findings that informal learning can be a by-product of formal learning. Furthermore, informal learning that is inspired by formal learning can extend beyond instructor expectations and anticipated course outcomes.

Most of the participants developed a need for feminism through experiences with gender inequity in their education and workplace. Once out in the "real world" (Kara) where women were beginning their careers, Emma and Kara experienced and observed inequalities such as gender disparities in hiring practices, sexual objectification in the workplace, and condescending attitudes towards women that were not experienced by their male colleagues. When present, feminism in formal education inspired critical thought and continued informal feminist education. For example, Nina incorporated feminism into her career, personal life, and online engagement which strengthened her formal learning of feminism:

> Being more comfortable over the past several years with incorporating feminist theory into not just my personal life but also my social media. And so, over the past, maybe 5 years that I've been actively on Facebook. (Intake interview)

Over time, Nina used her personal life and social media to engage with and learn about feminism. These learning spaces took place beyond yet connected with formal intuitions. Nina thus experiments with her feminist activism through communal and personal spaces. Similarly, Kara applied feminist theory to her lived experiences using her workplace as a space where she could engage with feminism to challenge gendered discourses of inequality:

> I never first-hand experienced inequalities until later on when I was… in the corporate world and then I saw it first hand and then I would learn about it later in

school. … Now I have a lot more confidence and I have a lot more knowledge and a lot more ability to be like "no that's not okay you can't talk to me that way." So, it's different. But it took me a long time to get there. (Intake interview) Experiencing glass ceilings led both participants to consider ways systemic oppression occurred in their lives through treatment of women, men's behaviour, and limitations of upward mobility. The participants' frustration with ways gendered power relations influenced their lived experiences inspired them to seek out informal spaces of education and push back against marginalizing discourses. For example, Kara began to critique sexist comments at her workplace, Emma and Alana began to engage in feminist research, and Darla engaged in not-for-profit humanitarian work.

For Emma, a lack of feminism in formal education inspired her to analyze education systems critically. She connected the absence of feminism with the absence of women in positions of power within education. Emma explains:

I got to the Master's level of university… [and]… in my intro class in my Master's there was only one man and the rest of us were women out of like maybe 20 students but the Deans and the administrators were primarily men so I was kind of curious about how is it that there's so many of us at this level and not at the higher level. … We're women, we're in universities, we're working there's lots of, we've made lots of advances there's lots of power there but there's still sort of something blocking us from moving to that next step. So, then I did my research on women in tenure track positions who have young children and what were kind of the supports and barriers that they perceived in that process. (Intake interview)

Like Luke and Gore (1992), the participants are "women who stand hip-deep in cultures saturated with phallocentric knowledges, in institutional structures ruled epistemologically and procedurally by men and masculinist signifiers" (p. 2). Emma perceived a lack of women in positions of power as being connected with broader gendered power relations that influenced women's upward career mobility. Emma reflected on the current placement of women's studies classes in universities, connecting the lack of feminist representation with neoliberal higher education agendas, stating:

> At the university level, I think schools are run more and more like businesses like… clients paying for a certain service and there's a university here in [a city in eastern Canada] that they actually in their manual refer to students as clients and that's like so friggin' depressing it's crazy…. I know women's studies programs have been dismantled across the country in lots of different schools and… it should be talked about in every subject and starting from elementary school…. I think it's really sad. Like literally when was the first time that you heard feminism? I'm not kidding, I was in university. (Intake interview)

Emma explored reasons why feminism was absent from her formal education. Analyzing the broader university institution, Emma interrogates ways business models and the neoliberal turn depoliticizes education. As Luke (1992) argues, institutional discourses that permeate multiple levels of education shape student experiences in university. What counts as knowledge relates to discourses of hierarchy, competition, objectivity, and rationality (Haraway, 1991). With these discourses influencing educational institutions, feminism may be absent, appropriated, or marginalized in formal education contexts (Luke, 1992; Walby, 2011). The participants' experiences reflect ways feminism is

underrepresented in formal education and the ways this delayed their engagement with feminist theory.

For the participants, feminism was often positioned as a lens for analysis or optional topic for consideration in formal education. It was marginalized within dominant discourses of legitimate education and depoliticized from activism. With minimal representation, feminism in formal education "does not provide the conceptual tools with which to rewrite those theoretical narratives and structural conditions that historically have formed the basis of institutionalized gender asymmetries of power" (Luke, 1992, p. 39). As such, in the few instances that feminism is represented in formal education contexts, feminism often becomes depoliticized and may sustain discursive critique within the classroom but not critique discourses in the lives of students or the society at large. Importantly, "critique and action, deployed at the classroom level *without* critique of the metanarratives that theoretically and practically sustain the structures and discourses of schooling in the liberal state, may miss the point altogether" (Luke 1992, p. 37). As such, feminism in formal education risks becoming appropriated into systems of power that operate to reproduce a status quo, rather than critique, challenge and transform gendered discourses and power relations. Participants unpacked gendered discourses in their lived experiences and began to reconsider and critique gendered power relations in concrete ways. Feminism is thus gradually learned over time and incorporated across a range of learning locations.

Digital Self-Construction: The Profile

Facebook offers a space where users are expected to provide ongoing accounts of their selves. Disciplinary forms of power influence self constructions as that power "is

exercised through its invisibility; at the same time, it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility" (Foucault, 1977, p. 187). Additionally, as Butler (1999) argues, the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (p. 185). Often construction of gender presupposes a free agent outside of discourse that willfully produce gender through language (Butler, 1993). Instead, construction is a process of materialization that continually reiterates and integrates norms (Butler, 1993). As such, subjects are both producers and produced by gendered discourse; actions in constructing gendered representations are influenced by and influence gendered power relations. As Butler (1993) states, "construction is neither subject nor its act, but a process of reiteration by which both 'subjects' and 'acts' come to appear at all" (p. 9). In this research, the participants engaged in reiterative processes when constructing their digital profile. Participants considered utilized, reflected, and challenged gender norms. In this section, I discuss the participants' processes of digital profile construction. First, I discuss ways participants used digital mediums and tools to construct digital identities. I then discuss tensions and considerations of profile construction that the participants consider including positive self-image, professionalism, beauty, and relationships.

Body as "Me," World as "Me": Shifting Subjectivities

Creating a digital profile is a visibly structured activity where users piece together various media representations to construct an online profile. Participants of this study represented their profiles on Facebook through digital, performative acts. In agreement with Butler's (1993) discussion of ways power is discursively materialized, digital

performative acts are not willful or arbitrary. Instead, regulatory power relations produce performative acts. Such performative digital acts are represented through material production online.

Facebook allowed for the participants to create representations of their selves using multiple forms of media such as images and text. Despite being perceived as a space with infinite possibilities for self-construction, offline social norms permeated the participants' experiences. Discussing ways Facebook users can control and manipulate their self-representation, Kara stated:

> It's just a space online, you can create anything… you can create the most positive image of yourself in the entire world on this Facebook page. That doesn't necessarily mean it's exactly who you are. Someone might spend a bunch of time with you and might find out many more things about you than the things they see online. So, you can create a space of who you want to be. And essentially that's a piece of you for sure and then the things that you post online, on the Facebook page are things that you want to tell the world about. They're things that are important to you, they're important to creating an image. ... Creating your image, creating your brand. (Intake interview)

For Kara, digital self-construction was strategic, positive, and even marketable. These emphasized or favorable self-representations can deviate from actual self-representation. Kara's description of profiles as being partial and created reflects Haraway's (1991) and Butler's (1999) theories of self-construction. As Haraway (1991) and Butler (1999) argue, identities are not fixed but rather partialized, incomplete, subjected, and situated within socio-spatial-temporal contexts influenced by discursive power relations. Kara views these digital identities as being produced, artificial, and strategic.

Although the participants had different rationales for their constructions, they each had intention behind their construction. For example, Natalia posted information that she "was really proud of" (Intake interview) such as her birth country, travel experiences, and career. Natalia explains how she emphasized features that she was proud of by changing or updating her profile; for example,

> I went through this phase where I really wanted people to know where I was just because I'm so envious of travel. ... I taught English for a year so that also opened a lot of traveling within the country that I was in so where it says "lives" I would change that like every other day. (Intake interview)

Natalia also stated that at times, she posted information to solicit an intended response from her Facebook friends; she stated, "I still like to receive a happy birthday message. So, it's got my birthday on there" (Intake interview).

Kara stated that she represented her hobbies, relationships, and education in her profile; she explains that the information that she posts are "all things that are really important to me" (Intake interview). Using background photos and profile pictures, Kara posts pictures of "skiing, running, and family members" (Intake interview). Like Natalia, Kara posts information that she is "proud of" (Intake interview). She states, "I like to include all of the different places that I went to school because it's something I'm really proud of and where I work because again that's something I'm super proud of" (Intake interview).

Like Kara, Carol used photographs from moments in her life as a form of self-representation. While Kara and Natalia choose the information that they are proud to share, Carol shares information that represents "who I am right now" (Intake interview).

Carol describes her online profile as being represented by images of her interests that she intentionally arranges and changes to convey meaning:

> I also don't want to be all about okay here's me and here's my face. But it is me… I think… is that how I am right now? .... Whatever's going on in my head at that time becomes my profile... the big picture [is] something that makes me happy… there might be a picture of me in it but mostly it's a scene or something that makes me feel good. (Intake interview)

The photo that Carol posts is not necessarily of her face or body but rather images that she associates with her happiness. For Carol, the feelings she represents through photos are more meaningful than a photo of her physical body. Furthermore, Carol highlights the fluidity (Butler, 1999) of her digital profile as it changes to reflect her current experiences and feelings.

Emma used Facebook to convey representations of her personal life so that viewers could follow events of her life. Emma described her profile construction process, stating:

> I think I just try to reflect who I am and what my life looks like right now and in terms of posting, I basically I just think, I have a cousin in Scotland, I kind of maintain it so that someone like that will know what I'm up to and what I'm doing and be able to get a glimpse of that. Other than that, it's sort of more critical commentary, I guess. (Intake interview)

Emma uses an anticipated audience to make decisions regarding her posting decisions. While she strives to post accurate depictions of her life to update family, Emma also limits posting content that may make her and her family vulnerable.

I don't post a lot of pictures around the kids, I don't talk about anything around

their school… I don't talk about, "oh we're away for 5 days" aka [sic] the

apartment's empty, so I think more safety or security things I'm a little more

aware of. (Intake interview)

Emma's digital profile construction is a negotiation between offering a "glimpse" of her life and maintaining "safety" for her children.

Darla's profile construction relates to her enjoyment of photography and uses Facebook as a place to share photographs; she stated, "the majority of what I post [on my profile] is photos. I like photography" (Intake interview). Similarly, Lena also represented herself through photos:

I think that is where I am right now, my dog and my travels so I think it's more

about what I'm passionate about…. I've seen so many people that are like "travel

the world." And I'm like I did, I am doing that, I am happy, let me post picture of

me being happy, let me post picture of me traveling instead of just quotes about it

and not doing it. (Intake interview)

Lena represented herself through photos of travel to show ways she is "living life to the fullest" (Intake interview) instead of living vicariously through motivational quotations or posts online. For Lena, significant experiences take place offline, and users represent these experiences online. For Lena and Darla, photography is a way to capture and communicate experiences held in the offline world. Similarly, Diana posted photos that represented her interests:

I take a lot of selfies … because I love being in nature and I take them all the time

with my different hats …, so I kind of chuckle every time I do it because it looks

so self-indulgent. Right? And I just like it, I like doing it, I like showing that I'm
out in nature all the time and I think to show that I'm not at a computer screen.
(Intake interview)

Diana and Lena used photographs to show their experiences and provide evidence
of their interests. In their descriptions of their profile content, all participants explain that
representing their digital profiles includes information and photographs of content that is
beyond their body and current spatial-temporal location. They comprise their digital
identities using a variety of photographs and information regarding international
locations, past educational institutions, work experiences, relationships, and physical
activities.

The participants demonstrate ways that they represent themselves beyond the
materiality of the body (Haraway, 1991). Subjectivities transgresses boundaries of the
physical body and is reflected and articulated through visual signifiers such as text and
photographs beyond the body. As a result, participants can alter their self-representation
to display their lives in idealized ways. Although Facebook can be a space to "create
anything" (Kara, Intake interview), it can also be a space where users can convey only
the best.

Pretty Photos

When the participants used photos of their faces and bodies, their photograph
choices represented feminine beauty norms and heteronormative relationships.
Participants considered ways they wanted to appear on Facebook, and some felt pressure
to appear beautiful within a public space. For example, Alana discussed ways she felt
pressured:

One of the reasons why I have so much trouble putting up my own picture is

because… I want to make sure I have my makeup and hair done so I look nice.

And then I hate the fact that I think that I have to do that and then I just think in

circles and quickly analyze this and then I'm like fuck it, here's a picture of a

buffalo and that sort of makes sense because it's this weird tension… I'm being

critical of myself in a way. (Intake interview)

Alana struggled with feminine beauty expectations when choosing a profile

picture. She felt that disconnecting her physical body from her digital profile allowed her

to share feminist media and ideas confidently. Alternately, when represented by an image

of her face, she felt her online behaviour was visible and regulated. Replacing a photo of

her face with a photo of a buffalo shifted her out of the observable field where she self-

regulated her appearance and behaviour (Foucault, 1977). If power is exercised through

visibility and networks of gazes (Foucault, 1977), Alana's re-presentation through a

buffalo may indicate ways she challenges disciplinary exercises online and circumvents

objectification. By interpreting how others may read her body according to gender norms,

she presents herself in a way that she believes avoids gendered readings. Here, Alana

rejects gender representation. She further provides insight into ways power relations

materialize gendered bodies online. In a digital world that is grounded on self-

representation, Alana's choice of profile picture may trouble popular expectations for

Facebook profiles.

Playing into gender expectations, Natalia chose a profile picture that emphasized

her femininity to attract attention from a love interest; she stated,

My profile picture hasn't changed since 2012/2013…. I put this picture up to

catch this guy's attention who I really really liked and it did catch his attention

and we've been together ever since. I just, every time I see it I'm like: One, that's

a great picture. Two, I'm not going to take it down just because like we live

together now, I love him to death, I just love this picture. It's also the first picture

he showed his family. I refuse to take that picture down. (Intake interview)

Diana tried to balance wearing make up in her photos with not wearing makeup:

"If you go through my profile pictures, you'll see some with makeup, without makeup,

like they're purposeful you know" (Intake interview). Natalia, Diana, and Alana highlight

ways that notions of beauty influence decisions for constructing their digital profile.

Perceptions of viewership when positioning in a public and observable field subjects

participants to normalizing gazes (Foucault, 1977). These perceptions of viewership

support their continued self-presentation in ways that perform and resist feminine gender

norms (Butler, 1999).

Relationships

In addition to representing feminine gender norms, participants' profiles also

represented their heteronormative relationships. Most participants explained that their

profile picture and primary visual marker for their profile was of their relationship with a

male partner. The participants discussed two primary reasons for sharing their

relationship status: to avoid unsolicited male attention or harassment and to comply with

heteronormative gender expectations. Kara explained that her rationale for posting a

picture of herself and her boyfriend was a way to limit sexual advances from men who

have access to her profile:

I recently put up a picture of myself and … my boyfriend… because I wanted to

show that I was uninterested in anyone else. So that was… creating an awareness

to all my friends who are guys who I may [have] chatted with or hung out with

> before or gone on dates with it's like I'm off the market everyone. This is my
>
> boyfriend. (Intake interview)

As such, Kara's profile photo operated as a visual reminder of her relationship status.

Emma described her profile photograph as "representative of who I am or what

I'm doing right now." At the time of interviews, her photo included her significant other.

She questioned if men felt the same pressure as women to post personal content online.

> I don't want to sound really gendered by, you know, a lot of my pictures and a lot
>
> of things like that are reflective of my family or my friends so that relational
>
> aspect of my life which is not to say that men don't do that, they certainly do, but
>
> I tend to think that's more of a female trait. I'm cringing for the tape recorder.
>
> (Emma, Intake interview)

Emma considered ways her gendered positionality influenced her choices for profile

construction. Emma questioned if social expectations of women as caregivers extended to

her online profile representation. As such, Emma's performative act of developing a

digital self representation through images of her family and significant other

demonstrates ways that online spaces produce and regulate gender norms and power

relations related to femininity and masculinity (Butler, 1993, 1999).

While Herbst (2009) found that some women may use male pseudonyms to

engage with online spaces safely, Kara and Natalia's indication of their relationship

statuses allowed them to engage safely on Facebook without receiving unwanted sexual

male attention. In doing so, Kara and Natalia reflected ways heteronormative gender

representations are upheld and reinforced online. They also demonstrated ways posts are

carefully constructed to encourage an intended readership.

Although Lena was not in a relationship at the time of data collection, she explained that when she is in a relationship, this photo often includes her partner:

It used to be me and my boyfriend, now it's me and my dog. I'm okay with it…[currently] it's a picture form vacation…. It's neutral and it represents me… happy, that kind of stuff…. I love that picture and I tried to crop [my ex] out so then he's not like oh my god she's posting a picture of us because it's not about him…. I just like that picture. I think it's a cool picture. (Intake interview)

As shown through Lena's experiences, heteronormative gender representations are encouraged through social media. When in a relationship, Lena's profile photo will represent this relationship. In describing her most frequent profile picture, Lena explains that her ex-boyfriend has been cropped out. She considers that readers of her photo will not only read what is present in her photo but also what is absent. As such, profile photos become presumed representatives of romantic relationships or lack thereof. Lena explained that she believed a few people considered ways they are perceived when posting photos online and questioned her posting process:

Like when you post a picture of yourself at the gym or work, whatever you're posting, that's on there, that's on there forever you're exploiting yourself… like nobody realizes that… and everyone's so happy and so eager to exploit their selves… there's pictures of me on vacation in my bathing suit and it's not so much to be "look at me" it's just because they're on there but yeah, I guess I'm exploiting myself. (Intake interview)

Here, Lena worries that posting personal photos and information lends herself to readership and judgement from other users. Furthermore, she is concerned that gendered

power relations may encourage women and girls to post photos of themselves that reiterate dominant gendered discourses. Lena's criticality of exploitative photos reflects Emma's self-critique of gendered content. Both participants reflected on their posting and considered ways that they may support gendered readings or practices through their self-representation. Problematically, the participants are caught between reinforcing and critiquing gender norms.

The participants constructed their online profile in ways that reflect Haraway's (1991) discussion of partialized and cyborg subjectivities, where identities are constructed beyond the limits of bodies. Haraway (1991) poses the question, "Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?" (p. 178). In doing so, Haraway calls into question beliefs that our gender identities are often associated with a fixed body and considers ways bodies intersect with diverse media, socio-temporal-historical contexts, and power relations. Combining digital images and words to construct a digital profile complicates notions of a singular, whole identity represented in affiliation with the lived-in body. Despite possibilities for self-representation, the participants' photos reflect offline norms. Thus, digital spaces are not blank spaces free from social norms. Instead, digital spaces are enmeshed within social norms that permeate the offline world.

Butler (2005) argues that "we are not deterministically decided by norms, although they do provide the framework and the point of reference for any set of decisions we subsequently make" (p. 22). Thus, to understand ways participants construct their digital profile requires understanding ways their subjectivity aligns with norms. Furthermore, identities are interpreted and given meaning by the readers of the identities.

Gender norms related to neutrality, beauty, professionalism, and relationships influenced the participants' digital profile construction. Decisions to construct digital Facebook profiles were shaped and interpreted by an assumed audience and peer interaction (Pearson, 2009; Robards & Bennett, 2011). Participants constructed their digital identities in ways that represented positive elements of their lives while considering multiple audiences' interpretations of their profile content. Like Herbst (2009) who found that "women have also repeatedly acknowledged that a non-female identity in cyberspace is the safer way to travel" (p. 142), the participants of this study discussed ways their female gender representation is negotiated to engage online.

Feminist Learning and Advocacy Online: Constructing and Navigating Digital Feminist Landscapes

As they completed formal education, the participants extended their learning of feminism through social media, specifically Facebook. Participants' understandings and alignment with feminism influenced how they interacted online. Interaction ranged from organizing or frequently participating in women's Facebook groups to reading current events and peer posts regarding current issues related to gender.

The participants found that Facebook offered a platform to learn through engaging with digital communities, feminist advocacy, critiques of gender in media, and online conversations. The participants of this study connected learning with contributing on Facebook. As such, they rarely discussed reading content on Facebook without also discussing how they extended their learning by reposting information or further researching the topic. Participants were simultaneously authors, publishers, readers, and

critics of content that they found on or added to Facebook. This section discusses ways participants generate meaning through digital engagement with discursive activism.

Content Consumption

Participants developed their understanding of the world by consuming information through Facebook newsfeeds. The newsfeed is an automatic stream of activity that appears on each Facebook user's home page upon signing into Facebook. It details the activity of friends, pages, and groups on a single web page. It brings together all Facebook content that users have chosen to display. Thus, all users of Facebook contribute to the content that is visible on their Facebook friends' newsfeeds. This engagement allows for Facebook users to shape and construct what is visible on Facebook, but, as Foucault (1977) argues, visibility may be policed and regulated.

The participants discuss ways that they engage with digital content by allowing Facebook to generate their news feed. This news feed allowed participants to piece together information and engage with current events or popular topics related to feminism which Carol likens to a modern scrapbook; she states, "my mom used to have scrapbooks and… they'd have all different newspapers in them… so I think it's the same with Facebook" (Intake interview). For Carol, Facebook became a public scrapbook; a place where she collected and shared personal photos, interesting news stories, and meaningful posts. Unlike traditional paper-based scrapbooks, Facebook allows instant access to conversations about current events and includes multimedia. As Carol creates her digital scrapbook, users who have friended her will be able to see the information that she is adding through their news feed. She further explains that this scrapbooking allows her to convey information that could lead to a conversation. Carol states, "I see what she

means… maybe I will talk to her about it later" (Intake interview). Carol's "scrapbook" thus becomes part of the wider Facebook information environment.

The information that users share on Facebook is then consumed and engaged with by other users. For example, Alana uses Facebook's liking and following options to manage and organize information that other users share easily: "I engage with feminism... based on what I follow or like because I think it curates news for me" (Intake interview). Alana further explains "for me that's just a way of gaining access to resources and YouTube videos are posted, interesting articles online, interviews, it connects me to a lot of things" (Intake interview). In addition to gaining access to a wide variety of information, this information is easy to sort through as it is "concise and it's short and it's interesting it's like... here's a couple sentences coming up [about] this interview she's doing... [am] I'm interested in it? yes or no. [If I am interested] I'm going to click on it and follow it more" (Alana, Intake interview). Here, Alana highlights ways that she sorts through content through Facebook. First, she decides which information she wants to have appear on her news feed by following specific pages and users. Second, she scans the news feed and based on the brief description, she decides if she wants to continue to read the article.

Like Alana, Kara used her newsfeed to curate information related to feminism by reading and sharing friends' posts that she believed were interesting or informative. Kara described her process of receiving and sharing information, stating: "They'll post things on their Facebook, and then I'll read them if they're interesting, and if I want to I'll share them on my Facebook, and that's something that I wouldn't have otherwise come across if I wasn't on Facebook" (Intake interview). Natalia reflects Kara's use of her newsfeed and explains that reading and sharing information is her way of engaging on Facebook.

She states, "I don't necessarily interact with other users... I read more than I partake…
whatever's happening on my feed I'm like, oh that looks interesting, and then I'll read the
article and then if it's worth sharing I share it" (Natalia, Intake interview). Natalia thus
not only curates information for her uses but further curates information for those who
follow her Facebook profile.

Alana, Kara, and Natalia all discuss the importance of sharing information as a
method of participating with Facebook. Like Carol, they piece together their newsfeed
through selecting who they follow and what information they share. In doing so, the
participants represent Feltwell et al.'s (2017) exploration of multiple levels of
engagement in digital counter-discourse activism. In liking, sharing, and reposting
feminist information, the participants contribute to counter-discourses. They shape the
information landscape of users who follow them, and likewise, the followed users shape
easily-accessed information.

Information sharing is not limited to pre-existing information already housed
within Facebook but is further developed through the contributions of the participants.
Natalia explains, "if my cousin will send me an email and he's like check this out, this is
something cool that like changed his perspective or I'll copy it and send it out" (Intake
interview). In doing so, Natalia further builds and develops content that can be circulated
and reshared beyond the scope of her account. As information is shared, the participants
contribute to Hall's (2012) notion of a "living social movement encyclopedia" (p. 137).
They become authors and co-constructors of information circulated within social media.

The information shared by the participants is perhaps more diverse and can run
counter to the discourses presented in mainstream media and formal education. As Emma
explains,

I'll watch the news in the morning but I get a lot more of my information from

social media so I think in terms of learning about things and informing my

opinion, it definitely crosses over into my day to day life and absolutely is

connected to my work…. we've still got a long way to go but there seems to be a

little bit of a disconnect; you know, it's something that we don't learn about

feminism in school. (Intake interview)

Similarly, Alana states,

If I turn on the news and [my local] news I'm not going to see very much that's

related to feminism, I might see issues that I can then think about in a feminist

framework, but it's not going to necessarily always represent women's issues. So,

it's really neat to be able to curate that on Facebook with that specific purpose.

[for example,] one of the things that's on the news a lot out here is like all the

missing Aboriginal women. I mean, there's a feminist issue right there, it's

something you can analyze through a feminist framework but... it doesn't

necessarily do that in the news and so... I can find that on Facebook based on

what I'm liking and following through that lens. (Intake interview)

For Alana, Facebook allows her to quickly access information that may not be readily

available in mass media outlets such as news stations or magazines. Instead, Alana used

Facebook to compile and then share meaningful and interesting information related to

feminism. Mainstream video and print media such as news broadcasts and newspapers

did not typically represent feminist content and.as such, the participants' access to

feminist related information through Facebook was both purposeful (in that they sought

out information) and incidental, in that news would be posted by other users (Valenzuela,

2013). Facebook was also a space where the participants re-posted or contributed to digital content. As such, web 2.0 media formats allowed users to self-publish supporting multiple authorships and a democratic way of sharing information related to social movements such as feminism (Hall, 2012).

Although their newsfeeds increased their access to feminist information, the participants also discussed ways Facebook sponsorships and broader social trends promote heteronormative gendered discourses. For example, Alana found celebrity gossip about the Kardashians trended more frequently than significant feminist issues. Alana explains,

> Sometimes things are sponsored or people might be presenting the news based on what they want…. Certain friends will share different articles than others will be based on their own biases and the message they want to send…. Facebook is putting up the news stories that are trending right now which I kind of use it for that… even though the things that are trending might not be the things that I care about. (Intake interview)

Alana curated news based on who she liked or followed on Facebook while newsfeeds automatically generated and curated news based on trends. Popularity of what topics are frequently posted determines "trending" content. This content shifts across a range of popular topics that may or may not reflect interests of the Facebook user. Alana uses an example of the Kardashians frequently trending on Facebook to highlight ways celebrities gain more exposure than critical topics. The algorithms that determine and re-circulate trends support a digital structure that is reflective and supportive of broader

gender norms (Herbst, 2009). Similarly, Emma expresses concern for popular

postfeminist discourses related to gender through her Facebook news feed; she states,

> I definitely see a lot of things through social media in particular that kind of make
>
> my blood boil… you know the kind of glorified media portrayal of some of these
>
> really high profile domestic abuse situations and the victim blaming that comes
>
> along with that... a lot of kind of troubling stuff. (Intake interview)

For Emma, social media conversations rarely discuss current issues related to gender

posted on in critical or feminist ways. These discussions of domestic abuse may perpetuate

marginalizing discourses such as victim-blaming. Alana and Emma problematized

uncritical trends of online feminism and believed that it was important to develop a critical

framework to understand and contribute to online representations.

Participants used Facebook to access content that they did not find in popular

media. They often had to "look for" (Carol, Intake interview) feminist content on

Facebook, as trending content was often "glorified" (Emma, Intake interview),

"disconnected" (Emma, Intake interview), or "biased" (Alana, Intake interview). While

Emma and Alana discussed problematic representations of feminist content, Carol noted

that feminist content was rarely evident: "I still think feminism is something you have to

look for and if you want to read, you'll have the tags, you'll have the pages you'll have

the whatever [app] downloaded to your thing [handheld device] that you can see every

day" (Intake interview). As such, Carol carefully filtered online content to learn about

gendered issues.

While Carol actively seeks out feminist information, she notes that others are

unlikely to do the same:

I have them because I've looked for them and I've made sure that I can see them every day. But other people I don't know. [For example,] the girl who was shot in India[1] and she won a Nobel peace prize. That was great but I bet there's a whole lot of women out there who need to be known or seen or talked about and it's just not and so I think it's a very subtle thing on Facebook. (Intake interview)

While the content on Facebook may represent issues related to gender more often than mainstream media such as television or newspaper media, such content may not represent or encourage critical and progressive learning (Choudry & Kapoor, 2010). The participants followed pages or users such as Anita Sarkeesian (Alana, Intake interview) or Wild Woman Sisterhood (Diana, Intake interview) that supported critical feminist social movements. By crafting their digital spaces in ways that would increase access to feminist content, they informally learned feminism within a public community-based space and private personal space (Steinklammer, 2012). Importantly, this space was not pre-constructed by a specific organization but developed by the participants in active and intentional ways. Facebook thus supported multiple perspectives on multiple current issues that were collected and assembled in the form of a "digital scrapbook" (Carol, Intake interview).

Although participants can intentionally craft their space in ways that reflect feminist content, Facebook exposes all users to trending content that rarely reflects feminist issues in critical ways. Instead, popular content may reflect narrow and problematic representations of issues related to gender. These representations may support simplified perspectives of feminism and may even support anti-feminist sentiments. Thus, while

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[1] Carol is referring to Malala Yousefzai, who was shot in Pakistan.

participants may construct their Facebook spaces in ways that support critical

perspectives, these critical perspectives may take place within a broader Facebook

landscape that promotes and reproduces normative gender expectations where men are

perceived as being more credible than women and where women are often targets for

critique and harassment (Hafkin & Huyer, 2006; Herbst, 2009). In constructing a space

where critical perspectives are gathered and consumed, the participants may extend their

information consumption into active methods of engagements and expand representation

of feminist content beyond their newsfeeds. As such, women can subvert dominant

discourses through their participation online (Bowen, 2009).

Facebook Methods for Engagement: Likes, Shares, Posts, Comments

In addition to curating and sharing news on Facebook, the participants also

strategically engaged with various Facebook tools. While the participants used Facebook

as a space for information to be shared and filtered, the participants strategically used

tools embedded in the infrastructure. Strategic uses of Facebook tools may promote the

representation and popularity of critical feminist content and ideas (Onuch, 2015).

Participants used a combination of pre-existing media and self-written anecdotes to

generate feminist discourses. In doing so, they use Facebook features such as "likes,"

"shares," "posts," and "comments" to frame, position, and consider gender

representations and feminist issues.

Re-posting content: Voice through multimedia. Participants used Facebook's "share" feature to distribute content that raised awareness about current issues related to gender and feminism. The share button allowed participants to distribute posts and documents instantly. Participants distributed, or "shared" content with their friends' lists, through private messages to other users, or other social media platforms such as Twitter or Instagram. This tool allows users to either distribute the post in its entire original form or to add written commentary to frame the post. While some added their thoughts and reasons for posting an article, others did not add commentary to let the article stand for itself. For example, Emma states,

> I figure that the tone of the article is going to speak to my perspective.... Usually, I would say something with a little, tiny blurb, maybe like a quote that really stuck out for me from the article… to encourage people to read it or… something like, "very very interesting perspective here." (Intake interview)

Emma carefully selects an article that reflects her viewpoint and then uses commentary to encourage others to read the full article.

Similarly, Diana directs readers to their posts with comments that highlight who she thinks would be interested in her posts. Diana explains, "sometimes that little statement I put about will say what it's about you know, read this if… this is an interest of yours, and then they can choose if they want to do that" (Intake interview). Similarly, Natalia writes comments that may entice readers to open the article: "I'll share things and if I do share things I'm like 'great share' or I'll post things like 'repost' to let them know I'm sharing, 'interesting read', 'quick read' so they know they're not going to have to read an entire encyclopedia of an article" (Intake interview). Natalia explains that she did

not add her commentary to shared posts because she did not want to influence readings of the original author's text; instead, she wanted her shared posts to "speak for themselves" (Intake interview). Natalia further explains that "the way that [the post] touches me won't touch them in the exact same way so putting my comment on it… change[s] the way that you're going to interact" (Intake interview).

While Emma and Natalia occasionally post commentary to encourage readership, Darla posts commentary to frame the article with her thoughts: "If I have my own thoughts to put on top of it, then I'll share it" (Intake interview). Emma and Darla shared other users' posts and added anecdotes. In doing so, they communicated their justifications for sharing the post.

Like Emma and Darla, Nina adds commentary to her posts; however, she does so to promote discussion by asking "maybe privately or maybe publicly: What do people think?" (Intake interview). Nina explains her reasons for adding a commentary:

> I am sharing my thought, but I am also showing an awareness that other people think differently. … And so, some people will catch on to that and share their thoughts and others won't… I'm just kind of adding to a conversation I want others to add to this conversation. (Intake interview)

Nina actively engages and seeks out a conversation on her Facebook page and uses her shared posts as a catalyst to prompt critical discussion and encourage participation. Furthermore, Nina promotes informal feminist learning by facilitating conversation and encouraging reflective engagement with information through facilitating online conversations (English & Irving, 2015). While Nina finds these exchanges to be productive, Natalia found that Facebook discussions about current events were often

"polarizing" (Intake interview) and argumentative. Natalia explains, "Someone will go off in a really negative rant and I don't want to read this and then there's the replies that are like, 'you're an idiot'" (Intake interview). As such, she decided to share articles that reflected her perspective on current events related to feminism but avoided focusing on comments.

Participants' decisions to select and post articles were carefully negotiated. Importantly, the participants discussed rigorous screening processes that they used when considering resources to share on their Facebook pages. Shared articles were often reposted from Facebook groups and friends as well as found through other websites such as Upworthy (Emma, Intake interview; Diana, Intake interview; Kara, Intake interview) and TED talks (Emma, Intake interview; Kara, Intake interview). While the participants occasionally posted information from external sites, most of their shares were re-posts. As Emma states, "I would say at least 50% or 60% of them would come from Facebook or Twitter itself and they are re-posts so I'm kind of spreading the word to other people as well" (Intake interview). Similarly, Kara and Diana share from groups they follow. Kara explains, "I'm part of a few different groups for that so if I see something that's interesting, I'll share it on my page" (Intake interview). Furthermore, Diana states that she "constantly" reposts information that is "feminist driven" (Intake interview).

Content posted to Facebook contributes to discursive understandings and representations of gender and feminism. In addition to finding resources from a range of websites, the participants shared articles and information that highlighted gendered issues or promoted feminist thought. In doing so, they diversified Facebook's discursive field by generating and sustaining counter-discourses (Liddiard, 2014).

While Facebook exists within a field of power relations, these power relations are productive, "produc[ing] domains of objects and rituals of truth" (Foucault, 1977, p. 194). The participants negotiate the discourses they want represented on their Facebook page. In doing so, they consider ways their posts align, challenge, and diversify digital norms. Describing her experiences negotiating knowledge produced on Facebook, Nina explains that her formal education has influenced the way that she evaluates articles that she shares: "My training is always kind of, weed out what is not academic, what is not scholarly writing or credible writing" (Intake interview). In critically reflecting on her decision-making process, Nina consciously works to expand the types of articles that she shares:

> we're not quite honoring that if we are only reading and sharing and publicly acknowledging one kind of writing style or one kind of story telling style…
> [Story tellers who are] highly educated [and] following academic rules [and ones who are]… not are both valuable and worth sharing and worth being critical about and worth just incorporating into our knowledge of the world. (Intake interview)

Nina describes discourses of research, education, and academia as being credible and valuable forms of knowledge that have influenced how she perceives digital content and information. Her formal training reflects Jack's (2009) and Daniels's (2012) research into how notions of credibility influence what content is valued. In sharing diverse forms of writing, Nina seeks to expand the types of credible articles that circulate on her Facebook page. As such, she pushes back against traditional discourses of credibility.

Participants used articles or posts written by others to convey important information when they did not feel comfortable self-authoring posts. The participants

used sharing as a "safer way" (Herbst, 2009, p. 142) to present their standpoint. They believed that readers would direct their critique or backlash towards the original author instead of the participant. In this way, the participants communicated their ideas through the writing of other authors that may already be situated within privileged notions of credibility. For example, Nina states,

> Facebook… has been a great source for me to post my own thoughts, in connection to… different memes, different conversations that are already going on. I'm not so much a person who posts my own, like just freely posts my own thoughts without it being connected to anything per se. (Intake interview)

Nina uses shared posts to convey her standpoint. Furthermore, she highlights the importance of connecting her standpoint with conversations and ideas that currently circulate on social media. Similarly, Kara shares posts to support her standpoint and use articles as evidence for her argument:

> If I've made a post that's politically charged, it's to provide support for that piece. So, if I shared that with that piece on the website on my Facebook, it's because I'm not only wanting to share the information but I'm willing to support it. (Intake interview)

As Diana articulates, sharing articles is a way to advocate for important causes. She finds that sharing posts is a non-confrontational way to share knowledge and raise awareness. Diana explains,

> They can read your posts they can delete you they can do whatever they want. But if it's something that they need, that's a good thing I think… [If] I think it's going to do harm I won't send it. Why would I? But it's, but I am sending things like

Upworthy's where it's controversial for some people you know, they don't want to read about the LGBTQ community, then they don't have to. That's the choice there. They don't have to view it. (Intake interview)

Nina, Kara, and Diana could voice their perspectives about current events using Facebook's "share" feature. Many participants used articles from other websites to speak on their behalf, add credibility to their standpoint, or deflect criticism. While content sharing may help increase the visibility of counter knowledge on Facebook, participants' concerns regarding credibility and backlash to their posts provide insight into ways Facebook may become an unaccepting or hostile environment for learning about and sharing information related to feminist activism. As Diana argues, posting does not guarantee readership or engagement. Instead, as Nina attempts, conversation on Facebook about shared posts may engage Facebook users in critical dialogue and learning. Facebook's "share" feature allows for widespread information transmission that may inform and even inspire public participation in various forms of social or political activism (Evans-Cowley & Hollander, 2010). However, in the case of sharing information related to feminism and gender equity, digital engagement may be perceived as controversial and thus not often represented.

Facebook offers a space to share knowledge through public posts and conversations. However, the content of these posts and conversations may be subject to discourses of rationality and objectivity that influences what knowledge is valued (Haraway, 1991). As Gore (1992) states, "the imaginary equality presupposed among subjects in public speech contexts… is premised upon liberal notions of disembodied, dispassionate subjects capable of equal and impartial (perspectiveless) normative

reasoning" (p. 39). The participants of this research discussed ways that objective, rationalized, knowledges were valued and encouraged in their Facebook posts. For example, Lena discussed gender differences in content posting:

> If I was a guy I probably wouldn't be posting love quotes or things like that, not that I do things like that anyway. … My cover photo wouldn't be some romantic love quote form my favorite song. … However, if I was going to post something about let's say hockey, if I were to post something about 'the Sabres won a big one last night' I would be hesitant to post it because that would ignite… a dispute and what not. So if I posted something I would be sure that I could back it up and especially if somebody, especially a guy who's more knowledgeable in sports is going to come at me I'm going to make sure that I'm ready for that. In that sense, because sports are a guy's world and love quotes are a girl's world. (Intake interview)

Lena was nervous or hesitant to post sport-related content for fear of being publicly challenged by male users on her Facebook page. She felt that careful and well-supported arguments were necessary to post content that was perceived as masculine. Lena's experiences highlight gendering of knowledge. To cross into the masculine realm of discussing sports, Lena is met with opposition and critique based on her gender. Her experiences parallel that of Daniels's (2012) findings in that female political bloggers were perceived as less credible than their male counterparts. In addition to representing their digital profile in gender-normative ways, the participants were also expected to behave in gender-normative ways and offer knowledge on gendered topics.

Disrupting gender expectations online was likely to be publicly disputed. When

challenging gender barriers related to digital content contribution, the participants felt pressure to demonstrate their credibility in ways that were not expected of men. Carol was cautious in content that she chose to post and tried to ensure that her posts were researched and supported with external evidence:

I honestly feel that if somebody came back with an argument I'm now going to have to go into Google and search things out… so at least the credibility is on somebody else and not me… I'm afraid of being wrong and I've put [my post] out to a whole bunch of people and now everybody can see I was wrong. If you have a conversation and you're wrong, only that person knows, but all of a sudden everyone can see that you're wrong, so… it's just easier to go through somebody else and then comment on that somebody else. And say oh they were right especially about that part, blah blah blah, and quote them. (Intake interview)

Like Lena, Carol was careful when considering ways her credibility may be perceived. To deflect criticism from her posts, she chose to connect her posts to articles found on the Internet. In this way, Carol demonstrated credibility of her shared information and articulated her thoughts through the article.

If posts were not critiqued based on underlying assumptions of content, they were critiqued for language conventions. Natalia felt that for women to post in credible ways, they were expected to construct posts that follow perfect language conventions:

Women [use] periods, everything's there perfectly: perfect grammatical structure, everything capitalized, periods, this that and the other. Whereas men, then again, I'm generalizing right now, there's less care in the way that it visually looks… there's no grammar in place… it's just babble versus the care that women will put

into the appearance to let's say a text so that we're not attacked on the language

basis…. I feel like we're more careful about that because we don't want to give

any ammunition for something that we said. (Intake interview)

In Natalia's experience, errors in syntax offered ammunition to critics. Importantly,

Natalia believed that women's posts were more frequently regulated and critiqued than

men's posts.

Like Natalia, Nina believed that readers privileged scholarly writing conventions

as more credible than prose or informal writing. Diverse knowledges could be shared by

posting women's writing that strayed from traditional notions of scholarly writing. Nina

summarized an example of a time when she shared an alternate viewpoint that was

informally written by "a person living in Bangladesh who wanted to share their

experiences with homelessness" (Intake interview). Nina chose to share an article that

was not academic; she explains, "there were spelling errors, there were no sources, but it

was kind of like a blog" (Intake interview). In sharing the article, Nina felt that it was

important to diversify what counts as credible writing and that sharing nonacademic work

connects with her "feminist beliefs" (Intake interview). Nina contributed to the digital

repertoire of available stories, perspectives, and writing styles available to those who

consume information on Facebook.

Amid concerns for critique, the participants carefully chose articles to share their

standpoints or inspire critical conversation. Emma, Nina, and Carol detailed their process

used when determining if the article was "post-worthy":

I don't just look at the headline and post it, I try to read the whole thing and if it

kind of resonates with me and I think it might resonate with some of my peers

then I might post it. … If I read something or see a video that really makes me

stop and think, or really sits with me or is reflective of some of the conversations

that I'm seeing already on Facebook… then I feel that it's kind of worthy to be

shared or "post-worthy." (Emma, Intake interview)

Nina reflected Emma's carefully negotiated process of article sharing. She also ensured

that her posts were relevant, from diverse standpoints, and thought-provoking. Like

Emma, Nina carefully read the articles that she shared to ensure that beyond the title, the

article was well informed and supported her standpoints; she stated, "I would look into

what is a credible source based on my academic training and if it's not a credible

academic scholarly source I may share it as—you know—here's another perspective"

(Intake interview).

Carol also researched her posts before sharing content on Facebook to avoid being

"embarrassed" (Intake interview). While she wanted to share critical thoughts on current

events, she worried that other Facebook users would publicly challenge the credibility of

the content in her post. Carol explains, "somebody will say 'yeah but did you know' and

here's the link to it. … You're kind of being called out… [and] some people don't do it in

a nice way, they just throw it at you" (Intake interview). Carol uses research to support

her standpoint and act as a "buffer" (Intake interview) between herself and disparaging

criticism. To counter critiques, Carol states,

I start looking for other peoples' posts who have been there or who have

experienced, like CNN or anything like that you know so that there are

credibility's in those things so you can say, "wow I just saw this" or "look at

this." So, it's known as this is my stance without me actually saying this is my stance. (Intake interview)

In using articles that she perceived to be credible, Carol deflected criticism away from herself and towards the article. Additionally, she could support her standpoint with facts that had been researched by a news outlet. This use of credibility and "facts" was a frustrating process for Carol and deterred from critical conversation. Carol explains,

They're making their point but they're… backing up whatever they're saying, like you just aren't having a conversation anymore, almost like you're writing your essays now, and we all have to have the right facts and everything and back it up and so it's hard to have a conversation. (Intake interview)

Carol expresses her frustration with digital conversations that rely on evidence and likens them to essay assignments often utilized in formal education. For Carol, this form of conveying information does not support informal learning through critical conversations and meaningful dialogue.

In these participants' construction of public posts, credibility was often a consideration. Participants felt that their digital posts would be challenged based on credibility of research or sentence construction (as with Armstrong & McAdams, 2009). Some participants chose to use mainstream media articles to demonstrate their credibility. In doing so, the participants upheld popular notions of credible news sources as they used mainstream media as a "buffer" (Carol, Intake interview) to speak to their standpoint. With concern for credibility being challenged based on sentence construction, Natalia believes that women pay closer attention to the ways they construct their posts than their male counterparts. Like Armstrong and McAdams (2009), the participants believed that

women's posts were subject to greater scrutiny than men's and were subject to greater considerations when posting information on Facebook.

Through contributing critical reflections to Facebook, the participants upheld an educative space to unpack complex societal issues critically. The participants perceived that online environments might not welcome feminist perspectives. Women may be dissuaded from participating in digital climates that they perceive as unwelcoming or unsafe (Harris, 2008). Critical online engagement also diversified discourses. However, to facilitate critical digital conversations, participants tempered their posts to avoid arguments that may inhibit learning (Vraga, Thorson, Kligler-Vilenchick, & Gee, 2015). For example, to limit public criticism and to avoid conflict, the participants constructed their posts in positive, non-confrontational ways. Furthermore, when challenging status quo beliefs online, the participants wrote their critique using additional articles or research. Some participants such as Alana and Kara felt deterred from posting critical content in public spaces and opted to share information through private messaging services with close friends.

Dialogue and self-authorship. The participants delineated their postings in two different ways: initiating and responding to conversations. When initiating conversations, participants wrote on their wall to voice a standpoint or share information (sharing articles was most common). The participants responded by engaging with preexisting conversations. The participants also discussed ways that comments deterred them from contributing alternative discourses in public digital spaces. Foucault (1977) argues that power relations are, in part, upheld through surveillance and discipline. In the case of this research, participants regulated their behaviour based on reactions from other Facebook

users. Due to the visibility of their engagement, participants were met with public critique and opposition when they posted content that challenged norms. For the participants, acceptable online engagement required that they meet perceptions of credibility (as discussed above) when contributing new material online, agree with dominant perceptions on social issues, and endure publicly posted attacks.

Participants thoroughly researched and carefully considered posts that were intended to promote critical thinking or alternate views. Darla shared an example of a post that she authored about Christmas charities. In her post, she sought to challenge dominant perspectives on a popular Christmas charity that distributed Western-Christian based care packages to Muslim communities in African countries. Darla stated, "I did a lot of research… and it was things that I knew and I found online the numbers [statistics] and I put into [the post] exactly what the organization was doing" (Intake interview). When voicing her standpoint, Darla thought that it was important to offer a well-researched counter-perspective to educate her Facebook friends. She expressed worry that disrupting the online status quo would garner negative responses and backlash. Despite her concerns, she received positive and supportive feedback that opened space for dialogue and critical thought. Darla states,

> When I got that alert [that my boyfriend's grandma had messaged me] I was a little bit nervous to look and see what she said. But she said that her church was doing the shoeboxes and that she was going to spread around [what] I had posted so that all of her friends didn't do the shoe boxes and spend their money on other things. ... My cousin actually wrote one and said that her kid's school was doing the shoe boxes and she just filled them up but she feels bad about it now… I felt terrible at that moment, but it is what it is, and she knows now and it's done… I

got a lot of likes. … But a lot of people put down [wrote] mostly that they weren't

aware of things. (Intake interview)

Amidst the positive feedback and constructive conversation, one Facebook friend

challenged Darla's post. This friend supported the Christmas boxes and the Christian

missionary purpose that the boxes served. Darla reflected,

I don't know if she was really negative… but questioned it…. I wrote back which

took me another long time, to write back to her with facts in it. … She just

commented that she didn't know that and that was the end of it. … It started a

discussion anyway. (Intake interview)

The example Darla shared highlights ways that she facilitated and prompted discussion

through her Facebook posts that disrupted discourses of charity as positive. All

respondents to her post were females who worked in caregiving and leadership roles in

their communities such as parents, teachers, and church community members. After

reading Darla's post, many publicly responded, stating that they changed or reconsidered

their involvement with the charity. While one respondent was openly critical of Darla's

post, she wrote that the information that Darla had shared was not previously known to

her.

Although Nina did not recount a specific example of a post she authored, she

expressed that, like Darla, her posting process involved critical thought and was intended

to generate awareness of social justice issues. Nina stated,

I take a lot of thought and consideration to what I post, but I believe that what I'm

posting can help somebody, maybe not somebody directly, but can be shared and

help the larger population in some way or inform or have somebody critically

think. (Intake interview)

Darla and Nina both discussed ways they used Facebook to support dialogue and critical thinking. For these participants, Facebook supported informal social movement learning by raising awareness regarding important issues (Hirzalla & van Zoonen, 2011; Valenzuela, 2013). While Darla and Nina discuss ways their posts inspired learning, this learning may influence further engagement and political participation (Burwell, 2010).

Participants occasionally self-authored content when contributing to pre-existing conversations. Nina described an incident where she offered an alternate interpretation on a comic strip that defined asexual individuals through a list of characteristics that they are not. Her friends' Facebook list circulated the post. Nina states,

I think it's the third time I've kind of seen it come around… everyone was just loving it, they were like oh yes, this is what we need. … And so, I commented on that. I just pretty much said, when you focus on what something that's so much of what it isn't, you leave out the potential for what it can be. And that was it. There were all these comments you know within the first 15 minutes of it being posted and then there was none. Then I waited, waited, nothing happened and then everybody who had posted had liked it. (Intake interview).

Nina highlights ways that articles and knowledge trend through frequent sharing and that sharers do not critically interpret these trends. She further explains that pushback or critique may shut down conversations. While Nina's friends may share common viewpoints and interests, Facebook may also support a culture of agreement where "like or be silent"[2] (Emma, Intake interview) expectations persist.

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[2] Data collection was completed prior to the addition of "love," "sad," "wow," "haha," and "angry" emojis.

The participants discussed apprehension when disagreeing online, believing that Facebook friends feel more comfortable with agreement than disagreement. Importantly, disagreement is negatively perceived and as such alternative or different viewpoints limit discussion. While Nina felt somewhat supported in offering a different perspective, this alternate perspective ended the conversation. Like Nina and Carol, Emma was hesitant to engage in "negative" or "challenging" conversations unless she could do so in ways that would engage the other commenter. Emma carefully considered ways she disagreed with other Facebook users and opted to frame her perspective in a positive way:

> If someone's commenting on what I said or maybe challenging that a little bit, not anything super negative, then I would engage in that discussion because… I want to back up what I'm saying. (Intake interview)

Emma used the conversation as a teaching moment for those who may be reading the dialogue and to further support her point. While she engaged in conversations with her Facebook friends, she was more hesitant to comment or post in environments where she did not know the other commenters or where the commenters did not appear supportive of alternative viewpoints. She describes her experience reading comments on public articles. Emma explains,

> I don't ever say like if someone posts something that's like, [the expressed sympathy for a celebrity accused of rape] you know 'oh poor Jean' I'm not going to comment and say 'really?' I would just kind of leave it but if it's something that I liked I would try to say that. (Intake interview)

While Emma believed that it was important to engage in critical discussions, she explains that this may be difficult or unproductive online with unfamiliar people. Emma,

like most participants, prefers to avoid disagreements which were experienced as

negative instead of constructive. While Nina unintentionally ended the conversation with

her critical question, Emma carefully chooses her public disagreements.

Kara also reflects on feeling hesitant to post her thoughts on Facebook for fear of

public negative feedback and difficulty with sustaining a conversation. Kara compares

posting her thoughts on Facebook to having a face-to-face discussion. stating

> I wouldn't attack someone for having a different perspective, but I think if we're
>
> in a room together and you share that with a small group of people I might engage
>
> in a discussion. … If you're posting something for 300 people to see I'm not
>
> going to interpret that as the same as if five of us are around a table and you make
>
> the same sort of comment. (Intake interview)

Furthermore, Kara found it more difficult to engage in critical conversations with

unfamiliar people than she did with close friends. Kara explains, "if it was one of my

very nearest and dearest friends…I'd feel more comfortable kind of poking and prodding,

whereas if it was someone that's a casual acquaintance I wouldn't say anything" (Intake

interview). The publicness of Facebook posts deterred Kara from posting critical content

or offering alternate perspectives. While Kara referred to her posts as a "right to voice her

perspective," the risk of misinterpretation and the high degree of exposure shaped her

notions of acceptable posts.

Like Emma and Kara, Alana expressed concern about public online debates. To

maintain critical conversations, Alana chose to engage with content privately through

messaging:

> One of my friends loves politics. … So, if there's something that I'll post, that I'll

either see come up through the news on Facebook or if I see something's been

posted or an ad that comes up that infuriates me… then I will take [the post] and I

will share that to her personally. It's pretty rare that I'll post something to

someone's wall but I might send it through the messaging. (Intake interview)

Alana, like Kara, feels more comfortable engaging privately with close friends than

publicly with acquaintances. Smaller spaces such as private messaging allow Alana an

opportunity to engage with politically charged content. She has meaningful dialogue with

her friend that furthers her standpoint. The participants' digital participation thus varies

between different levels of private and public spaces.

Contending with the power relations in this space, the participants self-author

sparingly and carefully construct their posts. The participants' concern for backlash

reflects ways female bloggers are discouraged from posting politically charged content

(Herbst, 2009). The participants are working within a digital climate where women

writing political content are frequently harassed (Herbst, 2009) and have their credibility

undermined (Armstrong & McAdams, 2009). In addition to self-surveilling and

regulating Facebook posts, the participants also contended with feeling undermined or

even attacked by other users. In the event that the participants posted critical content that

was grounded in research and devoid of errors, they were still subject to digital backlash.

The participants became targets for online abuse based on their gender representation in a

targeted effort to silence alternative and critical perspectives online. Natalia recounts a

time when she interjected in a digital public forum:

As a woman you would step in and say something… it was probably because I

was saying something against the grain of whatever the topic was and just like

backlashes of "oh and go make me a sandwich." (Intake interview)

She further explains her response to negative comments:

> As you get older you get that type of response from a male, you're automatically
>
> like, time-out. ... What you said is out of line. You go make me a sandwich?
>
> How's that? Get out of my face. (Natalia, Intake Interview)

While Natalia previously explained that she liked to maintain a positive Facebook environment, she has become more confident in defending herself when critiqued. Similar to Natalia, Carol preferred a positive Facebook space and experienced online backlash. However, she refused to let digital abuse deter her from engaging with important issues online. Carol stated, "I can't help myself a lot of the times… I'm not afraid of that [backlash] at all, if I have an opinion I'll put the opinion down…. [and] that makes you nervous as far as etiquette and protocol of Facebook" (Intake interview).

Despite positive online experiences when posting feminist content, Emma found that the few negative comments she received were from men:

> I've had you know like maybe a couple of comments like "oh okay, enough with
>
> the equal rights."… I've never had anything that I read and was like "oh my
>
> god."... But a couple of times sort of a response that I wasn't really surprised by.
>
> Just maybe, "oh get over it, make me a sandwich" sort of thing. (Intake interview)

Interestingly, Emma's experience with online criticism used the exact same wording as Natalia. Both participants referred to ways men discouraged them from posting feminist content and encouraged them to return to their role in domestic positions. Specifically, they were encouraged to prepare sandwiches for men. Emma explained that if she were to challenge men online, they often publicly undermined her standpoint. Emma reflected,

> I had posted something about… Pistorious, how he got 5 years for killing his

girlfriend… I posted something about an article like that and someone, one of my

contacts, said something really insensitive like, "he bladed away with that one."

(Intake interview)

When considering responding to a male users' comment, Emma stated,

I know that if you actually stood up and took a stand they'd be like "whoa it's a

joke, calm down." So, this kind of a blasé attitude around gender or feminism and

that is all men who would be making those kinds of comments. I don't have any

female friends who would, you know, comment negatively on me saying

something feminist… to be totally honest… there is a… traditional attitude here,

you marry young, you have your kids, so I think that's still a very lasting notion.

Very traditional gender roles and that's really clear I think in a lot of parts of the

province. (Emma, Intake Interview)

Emma explains that online anti-feminist sentiments are part of broader gender regimes

that promote domesticity. As Lazar (2005) argues, discourses related to family life

produce significations of masculinity and femininity. In the participants' experiences,

attempts at public critique are met with suggestions to return to domestic spheres and

focus on feminine domestic roles such as making a sandwich, getting married, and having

kids. Here, traditional femininity is encouraged by male users who wish to silence

feminist sentiments. As such, discourses frame feminist engagement as frivolous in

comparison to expected heteronormative feminine roles.

In addition to being undermined online, some participants expressed that other

users explicitly cautioned against posting politically charged content. While Emma was

undermined by male users saying she was too emotional and thus irrational by telling her

to "calm down" (Intake interview) when she responded to misogynistic comments, Natalia and Kara discuss ways that the feedback they received encouraged them to censor their Facebook. Kara found that liking practices reaffirmed acceptable and unacceptable Facebook content:

> my more aggressive posts don't get very many likes and they do make me feel discouraged…I shared one about the pornography industry and it was titled… why I stopped watching porn… it's a Ted Talk. … Not only did it not get any likes, but my dad called me and told me I should take it off my Facebook. (Intake interview)

Like Kara, Natalia was also discouraged from posting critical feminist content on Facebook:

> I posted something last week where I was like I don't know if I should post this or not. Like it was about Stephen Harper and fracking. Anyways, and immediately my father called me and he was like take that off Facebook right now, nothing political can be on your Facebook. (Intake interview)

Kara and Natalia both described instances where they were told to remove politically charged content posted on their Facebook profile. Both of these participants' fathers informed them that their content was inappropriate for Facebook. These participants' fathers' censorship of their daughters' Facebook engagement discourages women from speaking out on controversial topics.

For some participants, silencing practices by other users moved beyond behaviour that undermined the cause of what the participants have posted and into harassment

directed at the participant. Lena recounted her experience of backlash she received after liking an article about a celebrity couple who had recently divorced:

> [An ex-boyfriend] came at me, he must have had a stick up his ass that day. He was like "how can you like that, they're not a good example of what a family is… he was like they're not even together anymore, check your facts, it takes a little googling, how can you like this and support this."… It got me so angry. I think because he made me look stupid and I don't want to look stupid in such a public forum. And he was making it more serious than it needed to be to the point where it was going to make me look bad… I want to be careful about what I say, what I'm putting out there, and I think a big thing is how I'm perceived too. That's a big thing. But if any discussion needs to happen, nobody needs to see that so I'd rather do that in a private message... [My female friend] came on and started [defending me] like ripping him apart too and then he private messaged me on my phone and was like, "oh someone's coming to your rescue because you can't fight your own battles." (Intake interview)

In simply liking a post about a divorced couple, Lena became a target for attack on Facebook that further extended through other media to her cell phone. Not only was she publicly attacked, discredited, and undermined but she also received harassing text messages from the attacker after other Facebook friends came to her defense. Notably, her male attacker worked to position her as misinformed and "stupid" to challenge the dominant beliefs of family. Furthermore, the attacker upheld heteronormative notions of family through his attempt to condemn alternate familial configurations. He further publically condemned a female who voiced her opinion online and belittling her for

having an ally. For Lena, her attacker sustained a climate where it was not only unsafe for women to voice their opinions, but unsafe for women to align themselves with any issue that may counter dominant thought. Furthermore, a woman who defended herself online was subject to further harassment in the case that a friend aids them in their challenging of social norms.

In addition to dangers women face for voicing their opinions online, they may face additional dangers by simply representing themselves on Facebook. Carol recounted an experience of sexual harassment by a male user:

I had a guy that I knew in high school this is just, he found me through Facebook and he goes, "oh hi how are you." We just talked or not talked but through pictures and stuff and one day, he kept saying things like "oh you're so beautiful same as when you were younger" and I'm like okay whatever. ... And he wrote back and he said "so you can't even say thank you when somebody says you look good or something" and he cut me off of Facebook because I didn't say thank you for you telling me I look good. I thought, you jerk. (Intake interview)

Carol's experiences reflected ways that women's bodies are objectified online and how they are expected to be appreciative of objectification. In this experience, Carol received a comment on her appearance from a male user. While Carol found this comment to be inappropriate, she decided that instead of challenging him, she would ignore him. In doing so, another user met her with angry backlash that she was ungrateful for being praised for her online beauty. Both Carol and Lena refused to support their male perpetrator's perception of how they should behave online. As Butler (1995) argues, "categorization [of sex] can be a violent one, a forceful one, and that this discursive ordering and production of bodies in accord with the category of sex is itself a material

violence" (p. 52). Challenging gendered discourses resulted in public harassment and shaming. As Butler (1995) argues, sex "is a principle of production, intelligibility, and regulation which enforces a violence and rationalizes it after the fact" (p. 53). Here, the participants policed into adhering to gender norms and regulated through public verbal attacks.

The participants' experiences highlight ways expectations for participation code spaces. While digital spaces may offer sites for political participation (Burwell, 2010; Collin, 2008), they may also reinforce status quos and expected behaviours. English and Irving (2015) argue that social network sites create opportunities for formal and informal learning; however, ways access, use, and sustainability influence feminist participation must be considered. The participants' experiences emphasize divides sustained by discursive power relations. Steinklammer (2012) considers ways social practices influence social movement learning. The participants' experiences of digital regulation, censorship, and violence demonstrate how social practices impact their social movement learning. Facebook as a platform may, in theory, support open and accessible spaces for informal learning (Conrad & Spencer, 2006). However, this learning is limited, controlled, and manipulated by gender regimes that discourage public feminist thought.

"Likes" as Digital Support

Reactions representing emoticons and corresponding emotions including "Like," "Love," "HaHa," "Wow," "Sad," and "Angry" may shape assumed rules of Facebook engagement and enforce digital gender norms. During the time of data collection, the only option available to participants was the "Like" button.

The participants interpreted the like button as representing that they "agree" (Nina, Intake interview; Lena, Intake interview), "acknowledge" (Nina, Intake interview;

Kara, Intake interview), or give "a nod to" (Alana, Intake interview) another post. The

participants explain that "liking" is a way to show support and to encourage other users.

Kara explains, "if I see something… that's an interesting read and I read it and I like it…

I try to always acknowledge that at least with a like or sometimes a comment (Intake

interview). Similarly, Lena states "I will show my support by liking things. … I think in

that way I'm engaging… I tend to like things if I agree with them or I tend to like things

if I'm happy for someone" (Intake interview), while Nina states, "I think that with the

'like' button… I have read it or … I agree, or I acknowledge. So not negative" (Nina,

Intake Interview). As a form of supportive engagement (Brandtzaeg & Haugstveit, 2014),

participants may encourage continued feminist posting and reinforce changing online

discourses (Greenhow, 2010).

All participants recalled noticing a difference in the types of posts that other users

frequently like and do not like. Other users more frequently liked participants' content

such as photographs of their faces or environments than contentious political posts. Most

participants discussed their frustration with ways other users "liked" their posts. The

participants claimed that other users more frequently liked posts that contained content

that reflected normative notions of femininity such as beauty, fitness, or relationships

than posts associated with feminism. For example, Nina stated,

> I get more likes for [personal] things… than I do my professional related posts.
>
> People and then my own personal updates that include photos so maybe we got
>
> the new dog last month, I'd have over half my friends like that and comment on
>
> that whereas I wouldn't have as much with the other posts. (Intake interview)

When other users ignored thought-provoking posts, some participants felt discouraged. For example, Natalia found that photos of her new haircut received more likes than posts about social justice:

> I'll get like two or three likes, maybe up to let's say 11 likes and then I'll post a picture of my new hair or something like that one time and I'm at 75 likes for that and comment after comment after comment and I'm like this is bullshit vain shit, I don't like this. … I could get 90 likes for like a smile versus something that makes you think; like, there's such a disconnect there. (Intake interview)

> In this regard, Natalia's Facebook friends reinforced dominant gender

performances (Butler, 1993) that undermined critical or transgressive content. Natalia referred to differences in "liked" content as supporting "vain shit" that shows people are "paying attention to the wrong stuff." She further reduced differences in liked content to choosing between "a smile versus something that makes you think." As a result, of these misplaced priorities, Natalia felt disconnected from Facebook and considered leaving the site (which during this study she chose to do). Although Natalia used Facebook to share information related to important issues, feedback from other users discouraged her from posting critical feminist content.

Like Natalia, Kara highlighted distinctions between posts that received and did not receive "likes." For example, Kara discussed an experience when a feminist post received no feedback whereas an athletic photo received feedback:

> My friend put up a post "what kind of women won't report sexual assault."… It basically said in short the kind of woman who doesn't report a sexual attack is almost any normal, rational woman, and I thought that was a really interesting

article so I shared it. Now I did notice that it didn't get any likes. It got no likes, however my picture of, I won a race last weekend and my picture… got 29 likes and eight comments… when I shared it on my wall I thought, I had the conscious thought, I wonder if anyone's going to like this because it is a little bit aggressive. (Intake interview)

Kara believed that other users may perceive issues related to feminism as "aggressive" and thus not as likable as non-aggressive, nonpolitical posts such as a photo of her engaging in physical exercise. Due to feedback from other users, Kara perceived feminist content as being "aggressive" because it diverges from most of the content on her feed. Kara's reflections about audience intentions and motivations for responding to posts provide insight into ways feminist advocacy may be discouraged (Walby, 2011). While feminism has endured backlash through vocal anti-feminist campaigns, the participants of this research may be discouraged from engaging with feminism on Facebook if their feminist content is ignored or dismissed. Receiving positive feedback such as likes or comments from other Facebook user was an important motivator for posting feminist content. When Kara did not receive feedback, she questioned whether or not Facebook was a safe, supportive space for her engagement. Kara further questioned if her friends upheld feminist values.

Darla also expressed frustration when other users quickly or frequently liked images of her heteronormative relationship in comparison to posts that may be "prolific" (Intake interview). She stated, "within a day and a half of posting a profile picture of my boyfriend and I get like 30 likes to it. I post something I find prolific and nobody comments anything." Due to a discrepancy in liked content, Darla reconsiders the validity

of her posts. Darla explains, "sometimes I question leaving it up if there's been no interest, I guess. I used to question a lot more and delete things, oh well I guess it's not really valid" (Intake interview). Reactions from friends on Facebook may shape assumed rules of Facebook engagement and enforce digital gender norms. Similarly, Kara stated,

> When I have no likes on something that I posted that was really important or profound for me then you do get that "oh, hm, I wonder if I'm here all by myself. Does anyone else care about this? Any of my friends? Don't we have common interests? Me and my friends?" So, I feel like if someone posts something and I actually do believe in it, then it's my responsibility to show that I do. Like, hey you're not here alone, we're all connected. (Intake interview)

Likes operated in ways similar to short affirmative statements (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013) and as such, discursively operate to support gendered power relations. In noticing differences in liked and not liked content on Facebook, users may feel pressure to represent their self and activities in ways that are desirable or popular (Brandtzaeg & Haugstveit, 2014). As such, participation online may become limited or regulated to reflect that which adheres to broader social norms to receive peer approval. As such, the like button was used to reiterate materialized productions of bodies and places that adhered to normative discourses of appropriate a-political Facebook engagement.

Many of the participants believed that users did not always like posts if they agreed or supported the content. Alana, Kara, and Darla all said that they read other posts that are interesting and but do not always signify their support by liking the post. Alana believed that there is a distinction between what is "safe" to like and what is not. She thought that many people are nervous about supporting strong or thought-provoking posts

and considered that her reluctance to "like" posts might be a form of self-censorship.

Alana explained,

> maybe it is a little bit of self-censorship based on the audience of the people who
>
> may see it. I may find that interesting, but I might not like that because then
>
> they'll see I like that, and I just don't want to start a debate. (Intake interview)

While Alana highlighted why it might be unsafe to like content, Emma and Carol discuss

the hidden social rules of feeling compelled to like content. They described frustration

with ways Facebook's configuration of buttons influenced expectations for positive and

supportive engagement.

> The idea is that you like something or you say nothing. … But in terms of a social
>
> rule I think there's an obligation amongst certain people that you would support
>
> anything they do or say, and you feel obligated to like everything that she does or
>
> says on Facebook. So, I think there's some kind of… implied rule… [that] I don't
>
> say anything negative to people, I don't criticize or make nasty comments.
>
> (Emma, Intake interview)

Carol similarly questions the absence of a "dislike" button:

> I wish there was a dislike button… not their comments so much but you dislike
>
> the post. If they posted something for example that's happened in the world, you
>
> want to say yeah I don't like that. (Carol, Intake interview)

Beyond broader social regulation, Facebook's infrastructure may convey what

appropriate forms of online interaction are; online engagement should not be disagreeable

and thus "dislikeable." Instead, engagement should be agreeable, non-disruptive, and thus

"likeable." When participants did not receive a positive response, they questioned if their post was worthwhile.

Understanding ways that Facebook features (such as "likes") operate seemed to influence the participants' engagement strategies. For example, Alana noted that if she liked a page or article, then it appeared on her friends' news feeds. She claimed that this was a subtle way to engage politically online in comparison to sharing or posting, which she felt were more explicit and thus less aggressive. Alana explained:

> I will like things when I think that other people that are part of my Facebook will
> be interested in it because it will show up that I liked something, but it's without
> very explicitly being, like, 'look I'm putting this on my Facebook, you should
> read it, it's in my newsfeed.' So, there are maybe things that I like that I don't
> like, but I like those things that I think others will be interested in if they see it.
> (Intake interview)

Alana uses the like button as an alternate way to share information. She explains that liking a post doesn't always necessitate agreement but rather an interest or a way of emphasizing an idea. She contrasts her use of the like button with sharing. While sharing is more of a politically charged explicit form of disseminating content, liking is subtle but may achieve a similar effect of distributing content to her Facebook friends. Contrary to literature that frames social media engagement as frivolous slacktivism where users are uncritical of their engagement (Harris, 2008), participants intricately negotiated their use of the like button. They used and interpreted the image of a "thumbs up" representing "like" to indicate approval and support for shared online content. They also used the button to strategically increase representation of feminist content by encouraging continued postings and sharing content with personal social networks.

The participants are not only discouraged by the lack of affirmative support for feminist content but are angry at the ways they feel dismissed online. I believed that it was important for participants to feel a sense of online community that valued critical feminist posts to continue feeling motivated to contribute to feminist discourses on Facebook. By having personal posts such as haircuts, exercise, and pet ownership supported, apolitical domestic gender roles were upheld. Importantly, the observable field of Facebook operates as a normalizing system that operates "by bringing into play the binary opposition of the permitted and the forbidden" (Foucault, 1977, p. 183). Posting content on Facebook subjects users to "normalizing judgment" (Foucault, 1977, p. 183) that upholds differences and encourages normalization. For the participants, normalizing judgment takes the form of likes where they are permitted to like photos of heteronormative relationships but forbidden to like feminist articles that discuss rape.

Summary

Contrary to perspectives that social media engagement is uncritical, frivolous slacktivism (Harris, 2008), the participants intricately negotiated their experiences sharing, liking, and posting content on Facebook. Some participants shared, liked, and commented on content to indicate approval and support for shared online content to increase feminist information dissemination. In doing so, they increased feminist content on Facebook in ways similar to that explored in Liddiard's (2014) analysis of shifting disability representations on Facebook. As such, strategic use of Facebook tools may facilitate sharing information online and may further support representation and learning of feminist social movements online.

By upholding binaries of what is permitted and what is forbidden, disciplinary social institutions operate as normalizing systems (Foucault, 1977). Participants were

comfortable sharing pre-written articles that align with their standpoint, yet they expressed fear or discomfort when posting self-authored content to Facebook. Furthermore, participants' Facebook friends often liked the content that reflected consumerist and normative gender representations online. In this way, the participants internalized power relations in their decision of what content was acceptable to post and what content was not acceptable.

Often, the content that the participants were nervous to post publicly was content that disrupted dominant discourse. Sharing, liking, and writing "safe" personal content more than "unsafe" political content represents ways gender is continually regulated online. Similar to offline gender regulation and performativity (Butler, 1999), Facebook may operate as yet another site where normative gender representations are learned, evaluated, categorized, and reinforced. Furthermore, feminist standpoints may be perceived as "unsafe" topics and thus discouraged from online discussion. The participants carefully constructed their standpoint and affiliation with information circulating the Internet. In doing so, they demonstrate limitations and power relations influencing possibilities for digital representation and feminist activism.

Analyzing subtexts of liked content gives insight into ways gendered power relations infiltrate online spaces and operate to silence subversive gender representations or critical thought. Nonetheless, when taken up by feminist Facebook users, the like button can become a means of feminist information dissemination.

Self-Censorship: Regulating Online Practices

The participants in this research discussed ways they negotiated their engagement and self-representation online. Specifically, they discussed ways their audience shaped

their engagement. As Brandtzaeg and Haugstveit (2014) argue, Facebook users may feel pressure to represent their self and activities in ways that are desirable or popular due to user reactions and feedback (Brandtzaeg & Haugstveit, 2014). Furthermore, digital engagement is multilayered discursive performances comprised of various forms of engagement (Pearson, 2009). Through these online engagements, users can playfully and strategically shift their self-representation (Pearson, 2009). Importantly, these self-representations are enmeshed within power relations (Herbst, 2009). When at odds with dominant gender regimes, participation online may become limited or regulated. In the case of this study, participants felt pressure to maintain positive and professional self-images on Facebook and to manage their viewership.

Maintaining Positive and Professional Representations

Most participants discussed ways they negotiated professional representations online and the ways that career expectations temper their digital posts. When constructing their digital profile, participants considered ways feminists were represented as "angry," "bra burners." To avoid popular and often negative representations of feminists, the participants aimed to maintain a "neutral" (Nina, Intake interview) or "positive" (Lena, Intake interview) self-image. For example, Nina stated,

> Just making sure my posts and my page are pretty neutral so in terms of not offending people. I would never post any material that would say put any group or person down or be associated with anything that is hateful or mean to history or experiences of an individual. (Intake interview)

Nina tried to create a neutral or non-offensive space through her Facebook posts to foster a welcoming digital climate. When asked if neutral meant non-political, Nina explained:

What I may think is neutral might be, "whoa! I can't believe she thinks that way kind of thing." I have this understanding that people know what I'm going to post. … These are people who know me and connect with and respect how I see the world, so in that context I would say it's neutral; however, if I have random people that I meet that I have very little interaction, and they're on Facebook with me, I may have a very different experience with Facebook than I do right now. (Intake interview)

Nina created a space where her thoughts related to gender and feminism were integrated with her profile and reflected a community of respect developed with her Facebook friends. Nina explained that "neutral" or normative conversations might differ between her private digital space and broader public digital spaces. Importantly, Nina maintained her digital profile by ensuring that her posts reflected norms developed within her private Facebook space. Nina stated that she keeps her tone "very positive, I don't share anything negative or challenging with my life on Facebook where it's just my own opinion" (Intake interview). Nina's digital profile represented positive elements of her life and did not represent challenges. Nina wanted her digital presence to appear neutral, respectful, and positive. As such, her Facebook page positively reflected important elements of her life consistent with how she experienced and viewed the world around her. With power as constitutive (Butler, 1993), Nina's Facebook profile supported acceptable notions of self-representation and did not resist or challenge these notions of acceptability. Through power-relations, Nina learns what is "neutral" or commonly accepted and what can be seen as alternative or disruptive. She views the profiles of others and aligns with perceived norms.

Darla also reflected Nina's concern for reader interpretation of content posted online and tried to avoid representations that may be negatively misconstrued:

Now it's censored. I don't post pictures of myself with any alcohol for the most part or visible beer bottles or pictures where I look like I'm inebriated. Um it's mostly photos. I have some videos that I'll post of different things but it's always, would I show this to my mom? Would I show this to my grandma? Is this appropriate and does it present what I want everybody to think of me? Does it project a positive image? Yeah, I guess that's kind of what my thought process is in it. I think I'm more thoughtful now, I create more statuses and delete them than I ever share because I don't, it's so easy to copy or to take screen shots or to share things that, those don't go away. And I don't want my personal life to be out there in a negative way. (Intake interview)

Darla reflects Foucault's (1977) interpretation of panopticon, where omnipresent surveillance encourages self-regulation. Sustained and widespread self-regulation constrains possibilities for alternative or divergent gender representation.

Darla explains that maintaining a positive profile is important for her professional reputation. Furthermore, gendered expectations of complicity are embedded within notions of professionality for women. Darla explains that,

I see a lot of other people posting about work and different gripes that they have about work and I don't think that Facebook is the place for that. Not just because somebody would see that but because you're telling other people's lives especially that you work with people. (Intake interview)

Nina agreed that positive posts reflected professionalism. Nina explained ways she

integrates her "human" or "personal" thoughts:

> I will keep my posts professional, but also have a human element to my page…
> My photos that I post are who I am. So, maybe a picture of things that I see, not of
> me, so much as maybe the view of the mountains that I'm hiking I'm on. I've got
> a new dog so he's on there… so there's that "I'm a human" element, "I'm a
> person" … who is also a professional. (Intake interview)

Nina further qualified her experience balancing "human element[s]" with her
"professional" subjectivity:

> Any kind of personal thoughts without any of the posters and pictures and all that
> attached are more updates on my human side of my life so maybe I've moved, I
> kind of update people, how I'm settling in, again it's very announcement based.
> (Intake interview)

> Nina highlighted ways her digital profile was constructed in "polymorphous
ways" (Haraway, 1991, p. 163) that negotiate many power relations, including
professional and personal selves. Holmes (2005) argues that workplace interactions
widely circulate discourses of women in the workplace as "positively polite" (p. 49). For
the participants, understandings of professional work conduct influenced their digital
self-representation. Nina further described professional considerations for posting images
of her physical self:

> I guess like in person when we walk into a treatment facility working with youth
> or a school setting, or whatever setting it is, we would be trained to not look too
> feminine, not show our curves, whatever curves those may be, not wear too much
> makeup, not be emotional when the clients are having a tough day, male or

female, are kind of trained to be this way but that kind of talk (the curve kind of

talk and the too much makeup kind of talk) wasn't instructed to the male

identified students or staff right? And I've met tons of males who wear makeup

and tight clothes and you know show their curves and that's not talked about and

so in Facebook I kind of translate that to an online environment while you know,

you're too pretty. You don't want to have a personal distraction with these clients

because it's not about you, and it's not about any personal relationship, it's about

a client, what they need, and that's therapeutic practice. (Intake interview)

While all participants discussed balancing a personal and professional

subjectivities on their Facebook profile, uniquely Alana upholds two distinct Facebook

profiles that are differently constructed depending on her audiences and purposes for use.

Her professional Facebook profile shows an image of herself and is carefully constructed

to encourage a specific readership of who she is. Alana stated,

My work Facebook is a picture of me. … It's a fine picture there's nothing

particularly nice about it but it's a little bit more casual. The reason I put that is

because that's how I'm presenting myself to students and even though there's a

professional boundary, I try to be more casual in work. That makes me more

approachable to students because… there isn't a power differential that exits

between an instructor and a student like I am a support to a student so the more on

their level and the more approachable I can seem the better. So that's why I put

something that's more causal that's interesting… but for my own one I made

myself non-identifiable. (Intake interview)

Alana's work account was created to appear approachable to students with whom she

works. As such, she posted photos of herself in and out of work environments to represent an approachable profile that balances work and personal life. Alana and Nina highlight ways that formalized institutions uphold complex gender regimes (Connell & Pearse, 2015) where Nina must conceal her womanly "curves" and Alana must appear friendly.

As an alternative to posting content that aligns with gendered expectations of professional digital conduct, Alana and Emma discuss ways that they limit posted content. To craft her digital profile, Emma and Nina explained that, in addition to being strategic in their posts they were also strategic in what they do not post. For example, Emma states "I have information on there around you know, my education so where I went to school and where I work. … I tried to sort of put information up there, not put too much information up there" (Intake interview). Like Emma, Nina is also cautious of what information she posts. Nina states,

> I have a picture of me… and my name, but then there's absolutely no information about me…. none of my posts are visible, none of my friends, anything. So, I make sure that's kind of up to date because the privacy settings change often... I don't post pictures of children…. I don't post pictures of anyone who hasn't given me consent over the age of 18 either, to post their picture. (Intake interview)

Emma and Nina limited their personal information to predominately education and work. Like Nina, Kara's Facebook profile construction was a carefully negotiated process that included considerations related to gender, professionalism, and subjectivity. However, unlike Nina and Alana, Kara did not distinguish between her work life and private life:

> I don't really disassociate myself from work. It's just, I think I'm so integrated with what I do for my career and what I do for my life, it's not like I have a work

side and a me side. It's not like I have an educational side and I really feel like I live like I do live exactly how I believe… I don't think you could find a lot of things that are inconsistent if you looked at my photos and you looked at my posts or my news feeds. (Intake interview)

Kara integrated her personal life with her career to develop a consistent self-representation. Alana and Nina discussed pressures for professionalism and limiting personal information due to their careers. Kara was able to unite "work" and "me" with other identities that constitute her online and offline identities. However, she does acknowledge that those reading her Facebook profile may perceive inconsistencies between posts. In this, Kara recognizes ways posting a digital profile that represents multiple standpoints that may appear inconsistent with one another.

Many participants expressed concern that controversial Facebook posts may jeopardize their careers. As a future educator, Natalia felt that posting her feminist views may be dangerous:

I'm trying to keep it away from things that could possibly bite me in the butt… [For example] if I was going into the Catholic board and I was all, "hoo ha hurray I love the gay [community]," which I totally do, there might be a problem with that in the future. (Intake interview)

With concern for ways Facebook may impact her career, Natalia decided to censor her profile and posts:

I need to take [content] off [my Facebook page] if I want a career in teaching…I need to not have any type of human view or standpoint. I have to be very neutral because I don't know whose parent might be upset because of what I stand for outside of the classroom. So, it's interesting how I'm going to navigate feminism in teaching. (Intake interview)

Her concern for her job prospects tempered Natalia's self-construction and political engagement. She believes that her career as a teacher does not support having a human, personal, and thus political standpoint. Furthermore, communicating a feminist standpoint online may raise concern for parents in her community. Natalia recognizes that feminist posts can be impactful, and this impact may not always be positive. To remain "neutral" Natalia felt that she might have to remove any content that represented for what she stands.

Lena felt similar pressure to post in neutral and non-controversial ways for their own safety. Lena further rationalized maintaining a positive tone with her posts, explaining that

> I never post angry things because I think that's just bad news bears especially as a teacher. Like you have to be really careful about what you're posting on there. There was a time when I got rid of my wall completely when I first started teaching because I was worried that people would post stupid stuff on there and some people have posted stupid stuff, maybe on two or three occasions where I had to delete things. But not because they were horrendous but just because I didn't think they were appropriate for my personal profile and it wasn't what I wanted to put out there. So, I deleted it. (Intake interview)

Natalia, Kara, and Lena's concerns that their feminist comments will negatively impact their career trajectory demonstrates ways feminism may be feared or viewed as dangerous (McRobbie, 2009). Discouragement of feminist activism and pressures to conform to presumed gender roles establishes what McRobbie (2009) refers to as societal "rules of play" (p. 15). These "rules of play" establish appropriate feminine conduct and representation. In the case of the participants, the responses of other users reiterate

notions of appropriate conduct. For Natalia, refusing to adhere to "rules of play" may make her perceived as unsuitable to educate children. As Wodak (2005) argues, while "women who tend to be successful have to be active, fight for their opinions and not 'sit behind their desk' […] a very active role is portrayed which might be in conflict with traditional gender roles where women are viewed as dominant, threatening and maybe even irritating if fighting for a cause" (p. 103).

Participants' desire to maintain positive self-images connected with their concerns with viewership and perceived surveillance (Foucault, 1977). Carol discussed ways other users may read her profile content in ways different from her intended purposes:

> I think that people read it a million different ways if you just try to put it in… so many characters [adhere to a word count], who you are or what you are and so I'll try to put, okay just as a matter of fact. [For example] I posted… [a critique] about Aretha Franklin. Somebody else commented… "that, [last name] girl, I went on her profile and all she's about is material things and materialistic things" … I went back and look at my page and was like what is she looking at? And why did she think that?... So, I wanted to keep my profile just information, like I never put up what books I read or movies I watch or anything because again people might say "oh you like *Love Actually*? Well that's a schloppy movie" or something.
> (Intake interview)

Similarly, Natalia worried about ways her posts might be misconstrued and decontextualized to work against her career trajectory:

> You go and type the wrong key, that's stuck up there forever even if you edit it, someone is going to have access to the records of what you wrote initially. So that is very scary because it has accountability, it puts accountability to a whole other

level… if you discuss something in person, unless they're recording it, there is no way they can prove you ever said that…. So, it's scary, it's scary… I'm not going to be engaged in something that in the end could turn out to be negative… [I try to] avoid controversy because it sucks, I don't want to censor myself. Stop judging me is what it is I think… I don't necessarily care if you judge me… it's the fact that that judgment might bite me in the ass later on… so my use of it [Facebook] has slowly digressed over time in the amount of information that I'm sharing…. it's gotten really interesting over the years where bosses can now go online and see what you're doing, and people have not gotten jobs because of this that and the other or people have gotten fired because of something. (Intake interview)

Like Carol and Natalia, Alana discussed caution when posting public content on Facebook. Alana had recently moved to a new community and a new job. As such, she was increasingly concerned about how she may be perceived based on her Facebook content. Alana states,

I sometimes wonder if maybe it is a little bit of self-censorship based on the audience of the people who may see it. I may find that interesting, but I might not like that because then they'll see I like that, and I just don't want to start a debate. … Since I have moved, and I have people that I know would be upset about it that... I find I censor myself a lot more whereas before I didn't. … And even though there might be things that are interesting for others to see, I will not like it if I think it's going to infuriate other people. I can't risk doing that because of people from work. (Intake interview)

Alana explains that she shifts her digital behaviour with her perceived audience. Posts that she may find interesting could "infuriate" others which, for Alana, is risky digital behaviour.

While Alana reduces her digital engagement for the sake of her job, Darla engages in a self-censorship process. She explains that she censored herself when posting about injustices and engaged in the process of writing, waiting, and posting or deleting. Darla explained,

> Sometimes, I don't know I'll think of oh this happened today, or I'm really frustrated at this point about x y or z, so I'll create it and I'll think about it for a second and ask, is this really important? Do you think people really care about this? Or is this just dumb. Is this really of value? And if it's not then I'll delete it. If it's not something that I like in 5 minutes, then it shouldn't be something that I should put up and share to 400 people... If it's something that I'm incredibly passionate about, if there is an issue or yeah something that I'm incredibly passionate about that goes beyond that 5 seconds I'm mad about this right now, but if it's something that has I think if it's widespread and it's something that I believe is based on false principles then I'll post about it, kind of like an information sharing or a critique I guess. (Intake interview)

Perceiving that some of her posts were emotionally driven and reactive, she reflected on her posts to ensure that they are constructed in ways that support learning opportunities to users that may read her posts. Additionally, Darla's decision to post on certain topics connect to content, events, and information that were important to her.

> Similarly, Kara reflected on her decision to post critical content on Facebook:
>
> The things that I share on my Facebook page are things I think are important, so I'll share information about animal rights but not too much, I don't normally put up anything that's too gory because I don't want to see it let alone show it off. So,

I like to create awareness but I don't like it to be judgmental or in your face. I think I would rather my space on Facebook be educational but at the same time safe. Like a safe space to explore. ... Some of the things that I'm doing, I've got some things up there about different women's rights. I also have some things about yeah interesting things on, like if I were to say in which ways do I use Facebook to be an activist I would say between oscillating between women's rights and animal rights. (Intake interview)

Importantly, despite concerns for repercussions, both Darla and Kara decided to post critical feminist content that supported feminist activism on Facebook. To negotiate risks for posting content that may challenge status quos, the participants critically reflected on ways their posted content may have repercussions and considered constructing posts in ways that educate rather than offend.

To reach a wider audience and engage Facebook users in critical discussions, Kara decided to shift her entire Facebook presence to be more interactive and personable. To do so, she decided to engage with other users through posting on their Facebook walls and liking their status updates. Kara explains,

I was like, how can no one like this [feminist post]? This is awesome. This is where there's real, this is the real stuff right here, this is real education. But since then I think I've learned how to just kind of let it go…. I was definitely discouraged the first time I put some things out there because, at first, I was putting all things out there that were educational in some way, shape, or form, so like about feminism, about animals, about um, learning in some way because I was really caught up in that. About I don't know something that was political that was happening and that was really one of the only things that I was posting and I

was getting very little feedback. Like almost none so then recently just in the last year or so I started posting more about myself… and I'll get a ton of likes. … Since then I can see that, it's not that people dislike me, it's just that they don't know how to respond to those things. Like, they can like a picture of me running a race because it's a really safe thing to do. There's no risk. And if you like something else that someone puts up where there's any risk involved in it whatsoever, people probably won't like it. If it's on the fence, and you know they don't know how that's going to be viewed by the greater society then they might not go for it. Whereas I'm posting it all over my wall. (Intake interview)

The participants negotiated posts based on feedback from Facebook friends. Spaces may appear to support critical engagement and open discussion however such spaces are not "safe spaces… to speak out or talk back about… experiences of oppression" (Ellsworth, 1992, p. 107). Facebook users may limit participation in feminist activism online in ways that relate to Ellsworth's discussion of safe spaces. She argues that participation can be limited because of "fear of being misunderstood and/or disclosing too much and becoming too vulnerable [and] memories of bad experiences in other contexts of speaking out" (Ellsworth, 1992, p. 107). Acceptable engagement and credible posting may be policed and regulated according to normative discourses (Armstrong & McAdams, 2009; Herbst, 2009). Additionally, the participants may challenge or reaffirm power relations through their digital engagement.

Managing Audiences

In addition to regulating content represented on their profile, the participants were also concerned about the ways they felt surveilled and negatively critiqued. To limit negative feedback and social pressure for self-representation, they shifted their behaviour.

At times, participants felt that they needed to limit access to their profile to comfortably engage. In doing so, they restricted access to their information and limited the observable field through which they were surveilled and regulated (Foucault, 1977).

Natalia discussed ways users of Facebook contribute to their own regulation and surveillance by sharing information online:

> It is social policing is what it is... Initially I thought it would be so fantastic to have a book of faces because that's exactly what it is. It's like one huge high school year book. … With everyone's name, their likes their dislikes. What they're good at, what they're not. (Intake interview)

When Natalia initially began using Facebook, she saw it as a positive resource that would connect people. However, as access to Facebook expanded (beyond being only accessible for postsecondary students), it became an increasingly regulated and exposed place. Natalia thus began to perceive her visibility as a form of regulation; that to be positively perceived meant constructing a socially acceptable digital profile.

The participants discussed ways visibility and observation by public, and private audiences impacted their online engagement. They discussed ways they tried to control content seen by specific audiences. Darla discussed connections between her digital visibility and online behaviour:

> I'm not as liberal with my friends. So, back in the day you used to meet people at the bars or anywhere out and the instant that you met them you'd add them on Facebook when you got home or they'd find you on Facebook or friends of friends would add you that you may have met once and they'd instantly become your online friends. … Now none of those people are my friends and I've slowly

weeded people out. I don't add people unless they truly are my friends and somehow connected to me. So, friends of family or people who I've met more than once. (Intake interview)

Darla experienced more freedom to post when she had a smaller group of Facebook friends who knew her well in their offline lives. Darla tried to limit who may access her online information to avoid the dangers of oversharing and maintain a positive digital presence. While she carefully regulated which users could access her information, Darla feared that there were alternate and unknown points of access to her profile:

My personal Facebook account is linked up with the group that we have for work. So, I have an open group that is a business page from our program and… a closed group for the parents of the kids in our program. My personal profile is linked to that, everything is closed so people can't access it… but they do see the little picture, my school information, or any cover photos that I've left open. I don't know if there's a way to see anything else or if there's a way to hack through profiles easy but they have access to my direct page, so we have a close group that we post photos in for the program. So, it's changed now to include my work. (Intake interview)

Darla explained that she was cautious of her content because her work's Facebook page linked to her profile by listing her as a contributor to the Facebook page. As such, boundaries between her professional and personal identities overlapped on Facebook. Not knowing who may be able to circumvent security settings contributed to feelings of surveillance and self-regulation. Darla explained:

I do restrict friends yes… I feel more comfortable when that circle is smaller. But

also, when it's people who are involved in my live versus witnessing my life. I

don't need witnesses; if you're not involved in my life then you don't need to

witness it. (Intake interview).

Darla limited her visibility on Facebook to increase her comfort when engaging in critical

conversations. Furthermore, Darla ensured that she had meaningful and sustained

relationships with her Facebook friends.

Like Darla, Nina managed her privacy settings to limit her observability.

Perceiving Facebook as an environment where relationships can be developed, Nina

strove to restrict access of coworkers and clients:

I'm very well versed in ethics and [my job] so one of the things that is a big

highlight for me is, you know, shouldn't be seeking out any kind of relationship

with clients or former students that no longer exist within that service. So, I

shouldn't be adding former clients or former students to my Facebook page. ...

The second part of that would be, you know, I shouldn't be creating a pathway for

former clients or students to have access to me on a personal level and so I've

created my page and my posts to be completely private… whatever I post can't be

viewed by anyone other than my friends. (Intake interview)

The participants' desire to restrict viewership of their online content reflects Foucault's

(1977) argument for surveillance: "The more numerous those anonymous and temporary

observers are, the greater the risk… being surprised and the greater his [sic] anxious

awareness of being observed" (p. 202). The participants' concerns for their digital

presence and restriction of Friends lists demonstrate ways visibility may increase feelings

of anxiety and maintain obedient digital engagement. The participants desire to limit their

observability was often motivated by their desire to engage online without worrying

about upholding social norms of acceptable and professional engagement. As such, they could post and discuss feminist content with people with whom they have a positive relationship.

Diana, Nina, and Emma emphasized ways their comfort with critical engagement online is improved when interacting with people with whom they have strong relationships. Diana explains that her Facebook friends are also offline friends and as such, she felt supported when posting feminist content:

I think because the people that I friended are friends, there's no one on my Facebook page that I don't know. Like I don't have two thousand friends. … But everyone that's on there I could pick up the phone and call if I needed to… I know I have some level of connection. … It's not just random… I don't have any external [people] that would be critiquing what I was doing. They might critique, but they might also critique in a way because they know me. (Intake interview)

Diana highlights the importance of close relationships with her Facebook friends. She explains that because her friends know her well, critique would be constructive. For Nina, limiting her friend group allowed her to feel respected and comfortably share feminist content. In limiting and knowing her friends list, she found that her posts were better understood than if she had users that did not know her well. Nina stated,

I have such a control over who is my friend, I don't have nine thousand seven hundred and twenty friends, I don't meet people at bars and add them to Facebook the next morning. These are people who know me and connect with and respect how I see the world, so in that context I would say it's neutral however, if I have random people that I meet that I have very little interaction, and they're on

Facebook with me, I may have a very different, experience with Facebook than I

do right now. (Intake interview)

Both Nina and Diana emphasize that positive relationships positively influenced their

online engagement. Nina and Diana felt that they were better understood when

interacting with friends with whom they had positive relationships.

To restrict visibility, Alana maintained a professional and personal Facebook

account and limited her friends list to approximately 20 people. Furthermore, Alana only

communicated with other users through private messages and resisted posting on her

semi-public Facebook wall:

> The other thing Facebook appeals to is that you have that control over it. …
>
> Facebook can let you play with privacy settings a little bit… I can post something
>
> that I'm okay with everyone seeing but I can lock things that only certain people
>
> can see. ... My one friend at work we're really good friends but I don't want
>
> anyone else to know we're friends- talk about politics of the workplace- um, so
>
> like on my birthday she posted something on my Facebook that was put as private
>
> so only I could see it because other people that we work with are on my Facebook
>
> so… she was able to post it as private but at the same time I can get public things
>
> on there. (Intake interview)

Alana intricately utilized Facebook's tools to regulate her digital profile. Being

conscientious her digital representation, Alana sets strict rules and parameters around her

digital engagement. In doing so, she worked to balance her work and personal life which

allowed her to enact different online personas. Of the participants, Alana restricted access

to her personal information the most and upheld the highest security settings in

comparison to other participants in this study. In limiting access to her profile, Alana also

considered ways that she might be limiting her access to information and audiences:

> I really don't want people that I don't interact with so, I usually have the rule is
>
> that if I haven't talked to someone in 5 months, I take them off Facebook. Or I
>
> have family members that try and friend me that I don't know from a hole in the
>
> head and I don't friend them because it's not someone who is actively involved in
>
> my life. So, I think since I have that ability… I'm even more engaged with
>
> Facebook… within the last year maybe because I began to like and follow more
>
> people whereas before I was only interested in the feed that came from people but
>
> when you lessen your feed to like 20 people there isn't as much interesting things
>
> that came up. (Intake interview)

Alana discussed pros and cons that she perceived resulted from limiting her friends list.
In doing so, she highlighted her priorities and reasons for using Facebook. To
compensate for restricting access to Friends and incidentally limiting access to
information her friends may share, she chooses to follow organizations and feminist
figures. By following public and popular people on Facebook, she kept her information
private to users while she increased her access to feminist information.

> While many participants intentionally restricted their friend list to generate a safe
space for feminist engagement, Carol found it difficult to delete friends. Instead, she
preferred to regulate her privacy settings to restrict access to some of her posted content
by selected Facebook friends. Unlike the other participants, Carol experienced occasional
critique from members of her friend list. Carol recounted,

> I am actually afraid to delete people. I am such a people pleaser I'm like I can't let
>
> that person know I just took them off but [my daughter] told me I could do it
>
> without them knowing. But… when that girl looked on my Facebook page [and

critiqued me] I changed my settings, [and] somebody commented on "ha ha [name] just… she just made her privacy settings so nobody [could see her posts]" and I thought yeah because all of a sudden you said that I was this kind of person so I changed my settings… Facebook's great—you can keep your group small. (Intake interview)

Carol maintained many Facebook friends so that she maintained a positive reputation. However, in allowing access to her profile by a range of people, Carol also opened her profile up to critique from users with whom she did not have positive relationships. However, Carol uses tools embedded within Facebook to circumvent negative friends as much as possible. In maintaining a large Friends list, Carol had access to a large audience for her posts and many different viewpoints from her own. Likewise, Emma discussed her desire to delete friends who disagree with her but also discussed ways restricting audiences implicated online learning and discussion. Emma described an example of a time when an online argument about domestic violence led to her deleting a friend:

I just un-followed that person I kind of felt like whatever I say you're just going to ignore and laugh at anyway so… I'm just going to remove you from my contact list. Which is maybe not the way to handle it but that's what I did. Delete friend. … Why keep exposing yourself to that? And certainly, I think education is the key to ending any kind of oppression of any kind so there's part of me that thinks you should sit down and have a conversation with that person… as opposed to me saying "oh you're an asshole." That's not going to help anything, but I think it's more a knee jerk reaction to delete. (Intake interview)

While Emma was critical of her decision to delete a male Facebook friend who was oppositional and undermined her online digital engagement, she also discussed ways that, as a female, she may be subjected to online criticism and emotionally react. Emma explained,

Gordon Levitt… had a clip up a little while ago and he was talking about the fact that he was a feminist. … [It was] a very basic kind of feminist idea. … In a way, I admired what he said because he was saying, you know what and if you don't agree with me, write me a message and let's have a conversation around it. … But then the other side of that was like, but you're a man so you can be blasé about it in a way. So, I don't know sometimes I just get tired of being like "okay, sure that's your opinion" and I'm going to be like "screw you I'm going to delete you" instead. (Intake interview)

While Emma was happy to see famous males gain viral popularity in support of feminists, she also recognizes that their ability to do so and sustain a measured conversation relates to their male privilege. Although having a conversation about feminism is an important step in learning, for Emma, these conversations are personal and emotional. Because emotional responses are often undermined, Emma felt that male feminists are in a privileged position that more often appeals to wider audiences.

Participants at times chose to limit their surveillance by restricting their privacy settings and friends lists. Implications of limiting online visibility were twofold. While offering freedom for self-expression without critique, they also restrict access to diverse perspectives to engage with in critical conversations. Positive digital feedback was often more desirable than disagreement and negativity. However, this positive digital feedback

did not always require agreement—rather a respectful approach that supported

conversation and learning. Importantly, for the participants, harsh criticism and personal

attacks lead them to shut down or restrict their public digital activity. Enduring online

public critique was difficult. As Emma highlighted, the personal is political (hooks,

2000b) and thus difficult to detach from in ways that may encourage calm conversation.

Digital subjectivities, gender, and knowledge constructions take on multiple

meanings as they are shaped and interpreted by an assumed audience and peer interaction

(Pearson, 2009; Robards & Bennett, 2011). The participants' interpretation and influence

of friends on Facebook reflected Foucault's (1977) interpretation of Bentham's

panopticon and post-structural feminist concerns over safety to speak. Importantly,

Foucault (1977) predicts that "we are entering the age of infinite examination and of

compulsory objectification" (p. 189).

While Foucault discusses visibility in structural organizations such as prisons,

schools, and hospitals, the emergence of social network sites such as Facebook have

increased visibility and surveillance into virtually all aspects of life. Furthermore, users of

social network sites willfully subject themselves to observation through joining social

network sites and constructing an often-public digital profile. As Foucault (1977) argues,

> the panopticon functions as a laboratory of power. Thanks to its mechanisms of
>
> observation, it gains efficiency and the ability to penetrate into men's [sic]
>
> behavior; knowledge follows the advances of power, discovering new objects of
>
> knowledge over all the surfaces on which power is exercised. (p. 204)

As such, constant and invisible surveillance systems shape subjects behaviour. In the case

of Facebook, the observed are simultaneously the observers. As such, normative

behaviour is both produced and consumed. In this way, Facebook identities are produced relative to their social network (Pearson, 2009), which discourages alternative or non-conforming gender identities. Furthermore, normative gender identities influence types of knowledge that are acceptable to post online. Limitations in types of knowledges that are "safe" to post relate to perceptions of surveillance and consequential self-regulation.

Building Community: Critical Facebook Groups

As part of this research, I invited the participants to join a digital focus group. This focus group was intended to collect data on participants' shared experiences, and issues related to gender and Facebook as well as create a critical space to develop feminist standpoints and engage in feminist conversation. Of the nine participants, seven participated in the Facebook focus group. All participants had previously joined Facebook groups to curate news and information. Nina, Darla, Diana, and Emma had also engaged in groups for social justice.

Participants were instructed to participate in ways that were meaningful to them. To begin posting, I began with an introduction of myself, after which participants also posted lengthy introductions of themselves followed by posts that they felt were relevant to the topics of Facebook and feminism. This section discusses the participants' perceptions and learning experiences of Facebook groups to engage with issues related to social justice as an alternative to their own Facebook wall. While the participants noted concerns with posting politically charged content and alternative perspectives on their walls, they noted ways that they felt comfortable posting in Facebook groups to which they belonged. Specifically, they agreed that having a focused topic, similar intentions for engagement and limited viewership enabled engagement in the group.

Negotiating Digital Representations and Feminist Standpoints

Through participating in the Facebook group, the participants incidentally learned to develop strategies to engage with other users in the group. These strategies related to perceptions of norms and expectations for discussing feminist topics. The participants chose interaction strategies and content by evaluating ways that other group members participated. For example, participants explained they learned to compose self-introductions based on what other participants had written. As Nina explains,

> I guess sometimes I see how other people post first about themselves… it was just like work bio, personal bio and then how are we connected to this group. And I just kind of used that as kind of a framework to bounce off of and then I just filled it in in a way that was meaningful to me. And I guess information that people might want to know about myself if they want to stay connected or get connected. (Intake interview).

Nina describes other peoples' posts as a "framework" for her own. In doing so, she analyzed discourses that were generated through posts and decided how to work meaningfully within this framework. Similarly, Alana explains her hesitation to be the first to post:

> I kind of waited for other people to kind of take the lead a little bit but I think I may have been third… I actually find that very difficult, how do I introduce myself to this group, do I introduce myself based on my job or my education, you know what I mean? There're so many different ways you can portray yourself. (Exit interview)

Like Nina, Alana observed other introductions before crafting her own. Alana also highlights ways her digital profile is fluid and discursively constructed. With "many

different ways" to portray herself, Alana chooses an acceptable self-representation that aligns with the participants in the group.

Similarly, discerning group norms, Emma introduced herself based on the purpose of the group. The group was created for the purposes of academic research. So, Emma believed that academic work might be the most relevant way to introduce herself to the group: "I think I just chose to introduce myself based on the context of the group, like based on my academic work more" (Exit interview).

As participants learned to follow a perceived template or "framework" for their self-introduction, they all shared their academic and career credentials. In doing so, they reiterated earlier concerns for perceptions of credibility (Armstrong & McAdams, 2009). The participants' initial perceptions of female credibility needing justification or support through research, was reflected here (in a feminist, closed-group setting). Lena was one of the last participants to post in the group. She describes how the introductions of the participants influenced her self-confidence and self-representation. Lena explains,

> I looked to see what other people were posting because I wanted to mimic the same thing and I think it was, there were a couple professors, and I was like "oh my god all these people are so smart, they're so accomplished what do I post?"… I put a lot of thought into what I posted because I wanted to sound as smart as them and as accomplished. But I read all the other posts first and I was like, okay this is kind of the template of what everyone else is doing. (Exit interview)

In developing their digital profile, participants assumed a "template" (Lena, Exit interview) for self-construction that included presumed or expected markers (Haraway, 1991) that reflected their interpretation of the group expectations (Pearson, 2009). Their reliance on group norms to construct their profile connected with some participants'

insecurity with their feminist standpoints. Some participants expressed feelings of intimidation when interacting in a feminist Facebook group, expressing that they doubted their ability or authority to participate in feminist discussions. Describing her fear for sharing her insights within a group setting, Alana states,

> I realized who that was and you'd go back to school mode like, oh my gosh anything she says is going to be so very intellectual and I won't be able to say anything as smart—but I got over that very fast. (Exit interview)

Lena also describes her apprehension to participate, explaining:

> It's so intimidating; we went into this forum and it's like, "I'm a professor here and dah dah dah" and I'm like, "I teach Grade 12 English" [laughs]. But then I thought maybe this is just my own insecurities, maybe I feel like I don't measure up so I'm, like, okay here's my posts, take it or leave it. But I still put a lot of thought into it. I typed it up in Word, checked the spelling, and then because it's a big long post, and sometimes you press post by accident and you're like, shoot! (Exit interview)

Lena felt intimidated by other participants' credentials. Like the other participants, she felt a need to justify her participation in the group and "measure up" to others. To address her own "insecurities" for participation, Lena was very meticulous over the crafting of her posts. Afraid that spelling mistakes might delegitimize her posts, Lena went so far as to craft paragraphed responses in a word processing program. As Lena used academic writing conventions in her group posts, Emma found that she was "intimidated" by the posts and felt like an "impostor":

> When I started seeing the kind of, the kind of things that [another participant] was

posting, they were very intellectual, very smart, very critical kind of posts. Very political. And I remember thinking at one point, almost feeling intimidated by that, like oh I was going to post this but maybe they won't really like it, maybe it's too flaky, which I think is for me a bit of a problem in terms of confidence in academe. Like I always kind of feel like a bit of an impostor. … So, I think ironically enough I think I felt a bit intimidated by some of the posts, like I wouldn't have had anything as strong to contribute which is kind of embarrassing to admit but I really enjoyed reading them and I got a lot of information out of it. But I think it made me realize that I'm not maybe as political as I thought I was. It kind of helped me frame myself, I think. (Exit interview)

The participants' concern with their qualification for engaging with feminism reinforces ways feminism is viewed as an academic discipline (hooks, 2000a). The participants doubt their ability, authority, and qualification to speak intellectually about feminism. Determining how to frame their digital profile reflects ways that feminist credibility is performative. Initially, the participants introduced themselves using academic credentials and communicated using academic writing conventions. These repeated acts performatively (Butler, 1999) signified authority, credibility, and legitimacy. As they continued through the many introductions of participants, they began to take the shape of a "framework" (Nina, Exit interview) or a legitimate and expected way of introducing. The participants believed that there were preexisting expectations for the group, without recognizing ways that they contributed to these expectations. As such, rules for feminist engagement become discursively constructed through digitally performative acts similar to Butler's (1993) notion of gender performativity.

Alana, Lena, and Emma's insecurities relate to their experiences in school where qualifications determine expertise. Furthermore, they felt that each other had more experience or confidence to participate in the group as such notions of adequacy were internalized and impacted their confidence initiating critical discussion. Similarly, Diana considered ways feminism may be difficult to engage with outside of academic spaces due to concerns with qualifications to speak and ways spaces are coded for conduct. Diana stated,

> [The participants] had to state exactly who they were academically almost to validate that they could post this which was interesting but also too bad because there's all kinds of people that they see this as an academic topic and it's not an academic topic in my humble opinion, I think it's a human topic, it exists everywhere, everywhere we go, in a grocery store in a you know wherever we go, wherever we travel there's some element happening and you can watch it happening but if it's only acceptable to talk about this in academic spaces then we're in trouble. So, what you created was like a little mini academic space because if you looked everyone had to kind of state who they were so that, "hey, this is who I am," so I can talk about this almost. (Exit interview)

Like Diana, Lina was critical about ways feminism has become housed in formal education. Lina explains,

> I guess I kind of felt that I had to have certain qualifications to be a part of this group but once it got down to it, it didn't even matter. ... And I wonder if that's just because that's how we identify ourselves, by our labels, and then, I got worried because I didn't have the same label as everyone else. (Exit interview)

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The participants doubted their ability to contribute to the group in meaningful ways and, in doing so, reflect ways formalized schooling has monopolized "what counts as knowledge" over that of learning in other contexts (Nesbit, 2013, p. 21). The participants saw each other as being stronger, more qualified feminists than they saw themselves. As such, the participants privilege credentialed, academic learning over every day, informal and experiential learning (English & Irving, 2015). As English and Irving (2015) argue, patriarchal, bureaucratic discourses reinforce official learning as taking place in formal education. Such discourses of education further diminish women's experiential and informal learning (English & Irving, 2015). In likening the Facebook group to an academic space, the participants use language, often used to described formal education, to describe their informal learning. Through engaging in feminist-focused conversations, the participants began to discursively "reconstitute themselves as knowing subjects" (English & Irving, 2015, p. 139) and the group as a valuable space for learning.

In addition to their educational experiences, Emma and Alana agreed that their nervousness to participate in the group was informed by previous Facebook experiences and negative feminist discourses. Emma and Alana both discussed ways that feminists are negatively portrayed.

> There's so much backlash on feminism…you're almost careful on how you frame it and you know I'll post something and I'll type it and then I'll delete it, and I'll type it again, and delete it, and I'll change a word where as you know there are people who don't do that at all. (Emma, Exit interview)

> There's some articles I think have really great points about feminism, but they might have some points that I don't agree with. … So, it's almost like, yeah, I'm a feminist, but I'm not one of those feminists. (Alana, Exit interview)

While the participants had experienced backlash to their feminist engagement on their public Facebook page, they experienced self-doubt in the private space. hooks (2000a) argues that "if we do not work to create a mass-based movement which offers feminist education to everyone, females and males, feminist theory and practice will always be undermined by the negative information produced in mainstream media" (p. 24). The participants' nervousness to participate in feminist conversations connect with media misrepresentations of feminists as undesirable and radical.

As the participants shifted their conceptualizations of valued knowledge, they began to contribute and shape the culture of the group. Describing decision-making processes when contributing to the group, Alana explained that she chose articles based on what she thought other participants may find interesting or meaningful:

> I'm also… trying to pick things that I thought other people would find interesting in the group as well. So maybe based on something someone else has posted and it's not as if "I read what Sally said, now I'm going to find an article that Sally would like" it's like I read these three things and I think that so and so also in the group might also find that interesting. In terms of how else I decided, I think I was really picky in what I thought was the quality of the article. (Exit interview)

Diana similarly reflected ways she tried to contribute based on the interests of others as well as her own:

> It was probably more aware of, if I was posting something on my page and I thought oh that would fit well with this particular group… anything that I felt would have represented out in the world. Like in the entire Facebook community, you know in relation to your specific group. Or our specific group. (Exit interview)

Lena explained that she felt comfortable posting an article in the group that may have received negative reactions on her personal public Facebook page. She credited this level of comfort to ways the group appreciated different perspectives rather than advocate for a narrow notion of valuable feminist articles. Lena discussed her experience posting an article that offered a feminist analysis of media's preoccupation with Taylor Swift's romantic relationships. Lena stated,

> I read [an article] on my Facebook page, and then copied it and shared it in the group because I thought it was relevant to the group because I thought it was something everyone could relate to because it was a group on feminism… [Posting the article] was something that was accepted as opposed to, "oh she's quoting Taylor Swift, she has no idea what she's talking about, she's an idiot, she's posting on Taylor Swift."… They didn't criticize me for it, but they saw how the article could impact them which was really interesting. Because if you did post it on just regular Facebook, people would criticize you. (Exit interview)

The group discussed participant positionality and articulated feminist commitments to form a "coalition—affinity, not identity" (Haraway, 1991, p. 155). Although the participants did not share the same feminist standpoint, they supported one another in their common goal critiquing gendered discourses and working towards a deeper understanding of feminism. As such, the participants interacted with and responded to one another and became co-constructors of the norms and climate of the online group.

The group did not require a singular unified perspective towards feminism, but rather encouraged weaving of different perspectives. In this way, the group members'

consideration of others and thoughtfulness in their diverse views enriched the learning through the group. Emma highlighted ways diverse perspectives expanded and reaffirmed her interests:

> I think the women in the group were of such a similar like-mindedness that there's nothing I would have disagreed with. [With one participant] I think there were things that I could tell her interests were different than mine and I'm just assuming this and she was just a bit more radical than I am but it's not disagreeing with those posts, it was just that it's maybe not, it wouldn't have been the top thing that I would have read that day. But I can appreciate it, and I don't disagree with it, but we just have a slightly different interest in that sense. (Exit interview)

Similarly, Alana discussed ways diverse perspectives interconnected:

> I think there was one that you posted that I shared part that I agreed with parts that I didn't agree with, I found when I was responding to other people's articles, I would try to… link it to other comments that people would have. I had like this funny dilemma around likes where I liked some of them and then I was like, am I a jerk if I don't like them all? There's six people in this group! It's so silly. I'm like, oh I liked those last two, and that one was interesting, should I like it or… because usually on your Facebook feed there's so much stuff that you're not going to like everything but in a smaller group it's more intimate and there's less of it. (Exit interview)

Despite having different viewpoints, Alana wanted to show support for all contributions on the page. In doing so, Alana wanted to ensure that all co-participants were equally valued. Lena similarly tried to acknowledge all posts in the group:

I tried to acknowledge it because I thought that it was important and if someone's

posting it then there's a reason, they're not posting it frivolously, there's a reason

they're posting it in there and so I try to acknowledge it. (Exit interview)

Lena, Alana, and Emma tried to support the co-participants in the focus group through

using Facebook tools such as the "like button." In doing so, the participants felt that they

were showing an appreciation for posts that aligned with and diverted from their

perspective.

The participants' prior negative experiences with Facebook and feminism

influenced considerations for engagement. As they carefully constructed their self-

introduction according to perceived formats for engagement, they attempted to conform

to the group expectations rather than offering an individualized account of themselves. In

doing so, they reflected ways subjectivity is fluid (Haraway, 1993), constructed (Butler,

1993), and discursively produced (Foucault, 1977). Their self-doubt reflected concerns

and limitations to feminist engagement in their initial intake interview. Initially, many

participants were self-conscious about their credentials or knowledge of feminism.

However, as the group unfolded, they began to reconsider ways formal education can be

perceived as a site for legitimate knowledge (Choudry, 2009).

Safety to Post

Creating a supportive environment allowed critical conversations to unfold. When

posting on their public profile, the participants were often concerned that their content

was too feminist, whereas when posting in the private feminist group, the participants

were often concerned that they were not feminist enough. Through the participants'

engagement with and support offered by the group they began to feel comfortable

discussing feminist content. As they engaged, they began to share and engage with social

movement learning (Steinklammer, 2012). In the feminist group, the participants could begin to engage and unpack their understanding of feminism and activism.

Perhaps one of the most detailed conversations in the focus group was in response to an article that questioned the effectiveness of clicktivism. Alana crafted a multi-paragraphed response that included formal references and hyperlinked examples. To summarize her argument, she stated "My thoughts about online activism are growing and changing. I think this article was a good starting point for me to questions [sic] my beliefs and judgements" (Alana, Focus group). Darla responded with a similarly lengthy and detailed post which she begins her response by stating "this is an issue that I think about often and teeter back and forth on" (Darla, Focus group). She continues to say that she is "torn" when it comes to deciding her standpoint on social media campaigns. Darla explains:

> Social Media campaigns can be great to raise awareness, and funds for great causes but when online campaigns are not entirely truthful, or when I don't see the connection between viral post (i.e. photo, video, hashtag) and the aim of the campaign (i.e., "awareness"), I will not participate just to be part of the masses. (Focus group)

The participants reflected on how they chose to post and what they learned from other users' posts. Although the participants did not seek to mobilize a feminist initiative or protest, they used this space to expand their understanding of feminism and to exercise their digital feminist engagement. Emma discussed ways that her perspective of the group shifted by the end of the research project. Reflecting on her hesitancy to post a video, Emma stated:

> I think it was Upworthy where it has the screen and the skeletons hugging and

kissing like a skeleton, but the X-rays of people hugging and kissing behind the

screen and then they come out and it's two men or it's people from different

cultures or whatever. Anyway, I loved that video, I thought it was really cute, and

I thought about posting that and again it was stupid, I thought, oh, maybe that's

not as serious, but I feel silly now for doing that. … Which I think honestly, I

think that speaks hugely to a lot of issues for some women. (Exit interview)

Emma connected her feelings of insecurity to broader attitudes towards feminist

content. Importantly, she worried if her content was serious enough to contribute

meaningfully to the discussion in the group. Furthermore, upon reflection, Emma

believed that her concerns related to feelings of other women and their confidence

speaking about feminism.

Alana initially felt reluctance to post her thoughts regarding feminism. Through

engaging with the group, she began to unpack the reasons why she felt uncomfortable

sharing feminist thoughts through Facebook in comparison with a small group. Alana

states,

I often have a reluctance about just sharing things on Facebook [because] I can't

contextualize it. Like here's an interesting link. Whereas the group it's a closed

group, it's all people who are part of the study. I feel much more comfortable with

that even though I don't know them personally. I can share a link and tell you

why I shared it and what I find interesting in it. (Exit interview)

By interacting in a closed group, with women who shared a common interest in

feminism, Alana participated in dialogue that had not been available to her in other

Facebook contexts. For Alana, this connected with visibility and self-discipline

(Foucault, 1977). Having privacy and being able to regulate what is seen online allowed

Alanna to participate with feminism in ways that she would not otherwise. Diana

highlighted differences between posting on public Facebook profiles in comparison to the

group:

> I think people presented things and posted things within the group. But would
>
> they have posted it outside of the group?... So, I was wondering… if this was a
>
> safe place for this particular group to post. (Exit interview)

While Diana did not describe her feelings of safety, she pondered how other

participants may have felt. Discussing their experiences in the group, Alana and Lena

described the group as a safe space.

> I felt good within that group sharing because it was like again, I know this is a
>
> safe space to share and like people wouldn't be in this group unless they were
>
> able to have a personal dialogue… I think that knowing… there would be no one
>
> in that group to rip the place apart so I that's helpful especially because I don't
>
> normally share like that on Facebook and you're taking a risk to do that. If you
>
> were in a group where there would be people who were completely anti-feminism
>
> that's why we're in this group, then I probably wouldn't post as much as I did.
>
> (Alana, Exit interview)

Although Lena did not initially feel comfortable participating in the group, group

engagement built her feelings of comfort and support. Lena states,

> I didn't realize it until the end was how supportive it was, and how we could
>
> literally put anything in there because we all, it was a feminist Facebook group so
>
> we were all on there for the same reason, we all had an understanding of what the
>
> group was and how to define feminism, and so you could kind of post anything in

there and it was okay and it wasn't taken the wrong way. Everyone kind of

respected what you said which was kind of nice and you don't get, like I don't

feel the same kind of apprehensions posting something in that group as I would

posting something in general…in the group everyone kind of understands so it's a

little more accepting; yeah, so I was less afraid to post some things in the group.

(Exit interview)

For Lena, the conversation in the groups differed from her expectations of Facebook

engagement. Instead of being silenced or judged, she felt that the group supported her

exploration of feminism.

Having initially felt inadequate when discussing feminism, Lena was pleasantly

surprised that the participants respected one another. For Lena, Facebook groups as an

informal learning environment allowed her to see the space as a "group of friends" thus

making it "really easy to have discussion… there was no pretentiousness… there wasn't

like there wasn't anyone saying well I'm the expert on feminism, I'm the expert on

this…. it was just very easy, open, fluid form" (Exit interview). Specifically, Lena

references her decision to post an article critiquing critics of Taylor Swift's love life and

an article highlighting the safety of feminine hygiene products. Lena explains that she

shared these articles because the information may "impact" or "empower" the other

participants (Exit Interview). While Lena discussed articles that she believed would

interest the participants, she also describes one that interested her. This article used a

popular cultural reference of a dress that sparked international debate: some saw the

dress's colour as blue and some as gold. Posted by Diana, the article altered the photo of

the dress to include a woman with bruises on her calling into question visibility of

domestic violence. Lena explains that this post raised many questions on what information gets circulated. Lena questions Facebook users: "do you see the real issues? … Everyone turns a blind eye but why? Because it's too much responsibility to acknowledge it? Why don't we speak out?" (Exit interview). In participating in this group, participants shared and engaged with information that covered a range of topics and approaches related to feminism. As such, the conversations demonstrated ways meaningful feminist engagement can take place in informal learning environments.

Uniquely, Nina felt comfortable joining the Facebook group because she had prior experience with joining groups on Facebook:

I felt really comfortable joining the group where I didn't know anyone, I normally do that, I either put myself in a group where I don't know anyone or if someone were to ask me to join a group, I would join. I joined groups basically because the topic is interesting to me or the way the group is carrying out is interesting to me, so I agree to take part in this role with you and I thought that it would be something that would be interesting for me to do and be a part of and network with different people and see how they see feminism with Facebook. (Exit interview)

The participants reiterated that it was important to develop a safe space to engage with feminist learning. At the outset of the groups, the participants tried to determine the social norms of the group to engage positively within it. Offline patriarchal discourses influenced their perceptions of acceptable engagement and meaningful contributions. They were apprehensive to have politically charged conversations that they often avoided on their public pages. The group was initiated as a space to share knowledge and

participate in community (English & Irving, 2015). As conversation unfolded, their common interest in feminism and informal learning eventually supported feelings of comfort and support.

Importance of Groups

Gendered power relations seep into everyday acts and representations of participants. While the participants had discussed ways, they felt regulated on their public Facebook profiles, they found the group to be more supportive of feminist conversations. Their initial concerns for participation such as their qualifications as feminists and credibility in posts was reflective of their prior experiences dealing with backlash from other users. They agreed that having a group focusing on a topic, maintaining respectful dialogue, and having a restricted number of participants, allowed them to engage in ways that they may not have otherwise. Participants eventually experienced the group as a learning space where they expanded their understanding and standpoint. For example, Nina reflected on ways co-participants shared thought-provoking content:

> Everybody posted something that they cared about, or they wanted to share with others and so that I appreciated. … If there was nothing really posted on this group, then I wouldn't really learn anything or wouldn't really have something to provoke thought and so again like I appreciate that people took the time and for whatever reason got something and connected it with us. (Exit interview)

Similarly, Diana appreciated that the posts were not "frivolous" and offered a variety of perspectives that differed but were not oppositional:

I like when people post things that make me think. And not just from academic

[posts]. [The group made] me think differently because it's always interesting to

hear someone else's perspective. (Exit interview)

Additionally, Alana agreed that content was thought-provoking, but in ways that were

accessible beyond the academic contexts within which she typically engaged with

feminism:

This wasn't necessarily about discussing theory and comparing points… it was

less academic. … I was so used to being in the academic sphere before and…

[there are] people that specialize in feminism far more than I would. [So,] I

wouldn't understand it to the level that they do. But I found that talking about it in

the context of the Facebook group with articles that we find that are not

necessarily academic…. [allowed us to] talk about feminism in this meaningful

accessible context but not necessarily talking about different theorists or different

authors or different researchers. (Exit interview)

The participants expressed excitement with having an opportunity to informally learn in a

non-academic context that connected with their lived experiences. Although the

participants began the focus group with a formal education framework in mind, shifting

to informal learning allowed them to engage in more meaningful or "accessible" (Alana,

Exit interview) ways.

Alana further explains how engaging in the group inspired her to expand her

access to feminist information through Facebook:

I started then looking for people I have read their books, or I've heard their talks

or I've seen them on Ted Talks I was looking at them as an individual on

Facebook to follow. Which I honestly never thought of doing that before. So

maybe it got me thinking [of using] Facebook in a more efficient way I suppose.

(Exit interview)

Following her participation in the group, Alana strategically used Facebook's tools to

increase her access to feminist information. Selecting pages to follow and automatically

generate content on her Facebook page allows Alana to diversify the types of information

available to her through her Facebook page.

Emma explains that engaging with other participants allowed her to reflect on and

learn about her positionality:

Seeing what other people were talking about it made me kind of recognize more

of my identity in terms of feminism and where I fit into that in that puzzle. … I

think it was a good reminder not to be so insular. Especially when you're doing

this [academic] kind of work and your nose is in your laptop all the time and you

kind of forget what experiences are for other women. (Exit interview)

Emma highlights the importance of engaging with multiple perspectives in order to

further understand where she fits into the feminist "puzzle." Furthermore, she highlights

ways that her experiences as an academic are often "insular" and can lose touch with

experiences of others.

The participants' experiences reflect the importance of informal learning.

Choudry (2015) highlights the importance of social interactions and ways everyday

experiences influence movements. The Facebook group offered a space where these

interactions can take place. For example, many participants shared media articles from

multiple sources and added their own critique or perspective to the article. In doing so,

participants shared their different standpoints and critically discussed current events that were not readily accessible otherwise. As Alana discussed,

> This is something that I'm interested in but maybe haven't had a lot of opportunities to discuss. … I notice too being a part of that group and reading certain things and I noticed that my feed would change a bit because I was actually posting and sharing and doing things that I would have for discussions about that with friends and family that I might not necessarily have before. And I think a lot of that has to do with being immersed within the topic of feminism in popular culture media now whereas before it was more me being immersed in the theory and that might be harder to have discussions about. (Exit interview)

Alana demonstrated ways discussing feminist issues allowed her to explore her understanding of feminism and feminist issues further. Alana's learning through the group further extended into her workplace:

> I know in the group I shared a little bit about the context of that to the colleagues that I work with, because I work at a trades campus which is 99% male, so one of the female coworkers that I work with, I was sharing with her, we were having discussions about it, which was quite interesting to be able to do. And I found that following pages made it easier to engage in that discussion whereas if I wasn't following the pages, I would have to go seek it out. (Exit interview)

Participation in the group supported Alana's access to news and information that further supported her confidence discussing feminist issues in her workplace. Alana's learning within the group extended into her offline life and influenced ways she continued to engage online. Reflecting on her use of Facebook following the group, Alana stated:

I learned new ways to use Facebook so I think that now that I'm following more pages and there's more that I'm interested in and more that I'm following on that topic that I use it more as a source of news than I would have before. (Exit interview)

While Alana increased her exposure and access to feminist content that supported critical conversations in her workplace, Nina discussed ways the group could support critical conversations with her sisters. Nina believed that non-academic, media-based, feminist content and ensuing conversations prepared her for beginning feminist conversations with teenagers. She describes an example of an article posted in the group that applied a gendered critique to the media attention of Taylor Swift's dating history. The article discussed ways that the media praised men for dating multiple women and harshly judged Taylor Swift. Nina reflected on the focus group's discussion of the article: "the image of Taylor Swift caught my eye… my younger sisters listen to Taylor Swift quite a bit and… I just kind of wished that I could have that conversation with my younger sisters" (Exit interview). For Nina, having a group to discuss feminist content in multiple ways allowed her to engage with conversations that she may not have in other focused groups or on her Facebook profile or newsfeed. By engaging with diverse standpoints and perspectives, Nina expanded possibilities for critical conversations to support and encourage feminism with younger females in her life.

Similarly, Emma learned information from the participants' postings and engagement. Emma also notes that her participation may not have been as visible as other participants as she was more likely to observe posts than to construct posts. Additionally, her engagement was occasionally through "likes" in lieu of written dialogue.

The group was great, and I got a lot of really good material and information from the girls. I think I am typically maybe a bit more of an observer maybe than participator. … I read everything that people wrote, and I often liked stuff as we were talking about earlier. (Emma, Exit interview)

While Emma may have been a silent participant, she still felt engaged in the research project and used tools within the Facebook group to indicate her presence and support.

While Nina developed tools to inspire feminist conversations with young women, Lena developed a greater understanding of her feminist standpoint and feminist activism than she had before the focus group. Lena reflected,

I loved it, I thought it was so good… I realized I'm more of a feminist than I even knew, I learned that, I know more about feminism, or understand more about feminism that I thought I did… I feel there's such a skewed perception of what feminism is and what it means because everyone pictures the woman burning their bras, everyone does, and I know I said that last time too. (Exit interview)

The participants engaged with feminism in ways that they would not otherwise through participating in the focus group. Unlike more public Facebook profiles, having a private group with few members allowed the participants to engage in focused, meaningful conversations. In similarly valuing feminism (albeit from diverse standpoints), the participants found commonalities and developed a community of respect. For Lena, engaging with feminism outside of academia allowed her to re-consider her understanding of feminism and critically reflect on popular representations that do not reflect her experiences.

Leaving Facebook

While the participants discussed ways that Facebook helped them develop their understanding of feminism, some still struggled with negative experiences. As such, some participants discussed times when they chose to leave or limit their engagement with Facebook. For example, Diana explained that she took a break from Facebook during the course of the research project. Diana states, "I went off Facebook for a number of reasons, for quite a while, I just took a sabbatical from it" (Exit interview). Although Diana did not elaborate on her reasons for leaving Facebook, she did highlight the importance of taking a break from the platform. Similarly, Nina took a break from Facebook to enjoy face-to-face community events during the summer months. Nina states, "once the sunlight comes out, you see a lot more people out on the streets and doing things and there's a lot more community events and I was a part of a lot of that" (Exit interview). Nina explains that while she does not use Facebook in the summer months, her need for community during the winter is what brings her back online. Finally, Natalia deleted her Facebook account over the course of the study to focus on herself. Natalia did not participate in an exit interview, but she did explain through email that she had decided to no longer use Facebook citing a need for a break. These participants' need for a "break" indicates how consuming and perhaps discouraging digital engagement can be. When engaging with Facebook, the participants constantly negotiate gender expectations and confront backlash.

Choosing to remove themselves from the digital realm allowed them to get away from negative experiences and continuous pressures for performativity. Unfortunately, in doing so reduces possibilities for digital counter-discourses. Dominant narratives that may have been challenged by these participants are now left to be reproduced without

critique. Feltwell et al. (2017) found that digital activism can take place through "presenting a counter-discourse to an established, dominant discourse" (p. 379). These counter discourses are produced through user critique and can shift ways marginalized people are commonly represented in media. Fewer critical and feminist voices may mean fewer contributors to feminist counter discourses.

Findings Summary

This chapter highlighted ways the participants engaged with feminism on Facebook. First, it outlined the participants' perceptions of learning feminism. The participants explained that feminism was often negatively represented in media and rarely present in formal education. Second, this section discussed ways participants constructed their digital profile. In doing so, the participants explained how they consider gendered expectations for determining how to present their appearance and personal information. Third, it discussed possibilities for digital learning by discussing the digital tools that the participants used, and ways gendered power relations influenced this use. Fourth, the participants discussed their perception of self-censorship. They highlighted reasons they felt deterred from engaging online and how interactions and perceived audiences influenced their digital engagement. Last, this chapter discussed how the participants developed a digital feminist community on Facebook. Here, participants highlighted ways discourses regarding gender, feminism, and learning influenced how they initially engaged with the space. They further discussed the value of small, focused, groups for expanding their knowledge about feminism and allowing them to safely practice engaging in feminist conversations.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Misconceptions of feminism continue to shape ways some women understand feminism (McRobbie, 2009; Ringrose, 2013). The postfeminist landscape, largely influenced by neoliberalism and perpetuated through media, has positioned feminism as irrelevant and passé. Meanwhile, researchers such as Walby (2011) have considered re-examining possibilities for feminism within changing landscapes. Within adult education contexts, English and Irving (2015) have detailed possibilities as well as setbacks to digital landscapes facilitating feminism while Hall (2006, 2012) has argued for the necessity of reconsidering ways social movements are initiated through social media. Feminist and adult education researchers have begun to turn towards social media as an important enabling and constraining social landscape. This research is situated within these conversations as it considers experiences of the users at the intersections of feminism and digital contexts for adult education.

In this research, participants engaged in critical conversations and shared information related to feminism. Research has critiqued and analyzed activist engagement through social media research (Choudry, 2009; Hall, 2012; Harris, 2008; Onuch, 2015). Importantly, Feltwell et al. (2017) note the difficulty in measuring the effectiveness of activist engagement in relation to "complex-wide ranging issues" (p. 374) and emphasize the difficulty of measuring effectiveness of digital engagement. Nonetheless, the participants of this study engaged with and learned about feminist activism in ways that parallel Feltwell et al.'s (2017) and Liddiard's (2012) notions of discourse activism. Through sharing information and engaging with conversations, they engaged in collective authorship supportive of alternative discourses of gender. However, their experiences often reflected ways perceptions of gendered power relations may

inhibit or restrict their digital engagement with feminist activism. The participants of this research have highlighted ways anti-feminist sentiments have deterred them from engaging with feminism and have infiltrated their online experiences. Participants' early exposure to feminism was often within a dominant discourse that framed feminists as angry bra-burners. These misconceptions were fueled and supported through mainstream media and slightly challenged or critiqued within formal education. Exposure to counter-knowledges and diverse perspectives sparked curiosity and inspired participants to pursue further and learn about feminism.

With limitations to access and parameters of formal education, social media such as Facebook offer a somewhat accessible space for feminist learning. Importantly, social media sites such as Facebook offer a platform within which users create and construct content. To access feminist information, participants had to manipulate and construct the parameters of the infrastructure within which they learned and participated. To engage with social media, participants had to make (often calculated) decisions such as: how they constructed their profile, what friends they wanted to have, what information they wanted to share, how to frame shared information, how to engage in conversation within public spaces, how to manage privacy settings and access to their information, and what groups or pages would support their feminist learning. Importantly, this online landscape is not devoid of offline gendered power relations that constitute norms and influence engagement. Facebook is a user-constructed space where the content available for readership is content that is posted and shared. Disruptive content such as feminist articles may not be shared due to fears of disrupting the perceived status quo. To shape content and diversify information online, feminist users must actively participate. This participation, as Liddiard (2014) argues, has the ability to shape dominant discourses

online which can be considered a form of activist engagement. Unfortunately, perceptions of power relations and negative experiences with critique often discouraged the participants from active participation.

Contributing to feminism on social media allows for alternate possibilities for representations of feminism beyond postfeminism. However, contributing in critical ways may at times, be a dangerous endeavor. The participants in this research detailed barriers and limitations to engaging in critical ways as other users undermined, discredited, ignored, or even bullied participants when they offered critical feminist perspectives on social issues. Reflecting concerns for women's safety online (Harris, 2008), the participants' experiences and frustrations with confronting gendered power relations indicates ways that social media such as Facebook may be dangerous for women. If engaging with feminism on Facebook is experienced as dangerous, feminist activists may choose to quiet or regulate their digital activist voices.

Having opportunities to discuss feminism was an important component to developing feminist positionality. As the participants discussed in their formal learning of feminism, understanding their feminist standpoint required that the feminist theory connected to their lived experiences. Developing and learning about feminism was facilitated through having critical conversations and social network sites such as Facebook can facilitate this in ways that overcome time–space limitations. Facebook groups such as that developed in the focus group are semi-private spaces that can only be accessed by approved members. This member-regulated space allowed participants to feel safe in ways that differed from engagement through their profile or newsfeed. In reflecting on their experiences discussing feminism within the group, all participants agreed that they had strengthened their understanding of feminism and had gained access

to resources and information that supported their engagement with feminism outside of the group. The participants built feminist tools such as following feminist Facebook pages, clarifying their perspective on some feminist issues, and further sharing articles posted in the group that they could use to educate others about feminism or critically analyze power relations in their lives.

The findings of this research have implications for sociological understandings of digital spaces for learning. Importantly, this research addresses Sassen's (2002) objectives to develop a sociology for information technology. She argues that "The challenge for sociology is not so much to deny the weight of technology, but rather to develop analytic categories that allow us to capture the complex imbrications of technology and society" (p. 365). In analyzing participant engagement with discourses in digital spaces, this research begins to uncover possibilities and impacts of interactions within social media. This research further adds a digital perspective to Wodak's (2005) findings. While Wodak (2005) argues that research on feminism must not only consider the "actions, practices, strategies and intentions of its players [but] on the determining structures overpowering the players and leaving them little room to maneuver" (p. 107). This research attempts to understand the structures at play within digital social landscapes. As such, this research attempts to capture some of the complexities of digital feminist engagement for some women.

Implications

Upon beginning this research, I sought to explore the primary question: How do women learn feminism, represent themselves, and enact feminism within Facebook? Specifically, I explore:

- How do feminists learn to construct and represent their selves online?

- What gendered power relations influence users' learning of feminism on Facebook?

- How can Facebook be used as a site for learning and participating in social movements such as feminism?

Through my research, I have found that these research questions interconnect through a complex process of digital engagement that altogether considers ways Facebook's structure contributes to and hinders learning and participation contingent on ways power relations circulate within this space. These structures and power relations further influence ways that participants represent themselves online. As such, to understand my primary research question (how do women learn feminism, represent themselves, and enact feminism Facebook?), I must understand the standpoint of the individual engaging within the space and the broader web of gendered power relations that regulate learning, participation, and subjectivities. Answering these research questions began a mapping process of gendered power relations in digital learning spaces. This mapping process has implications for understanding the structure of Facebook, digital knowledge construction, the materiality of bodies, and digital feminist solidarity.

Ways Structure Can Impact Engagement

Focusing specifically on Facebook, findings of this research highlight ways power relations discursively operate within the social media platform structure. These structural elements include communication tools, visual layouts, and access settings. The participants described ways these structures are understood and manipulated to maintain and challenge gendered discourses. Importantly, the participants described how discourses of appropriate Facebook use are generated. For example, discourses of

acceptable engagement as complicit, non-disruptive, or neutral may be reinforced when users are publicly critiqued or do not receive likes for a post on gendered inequity. The participants explained ways they negotiated discourses by shifting their Facebook engagement. For example, in knowing that liked content would appear on her friends' news feeds, Alana would like feminist content. Furthermore, due to anti-feminist backlash and postfeminist sentiments permeating social media, liking feminist content was a way for Alana to assume a digital feminist standpoint. Liking feminist content was simultaneously dangerous, strategic, and subversive. Participants shared similar experiences in their using of other Facebook tools such as sharing content, posting content, and following users. The participants' use of social media tools demonstrates ways users thoughtfully engage with, reinforce, and at times manipulate dominant discourses on social media.

Ways Knowledge Can Be Digitally Constructed

As Taber (2015) argues, gender is learned and this learning takes place in multiple, intersecting spaces beyond formal education institutions. Facebook can be understood as one of many pedagogical sites where users are active constructors and engaged learners. In this research, participants learned feminism in informal and interconnected ways. They connected their offline lived experiences, formal education, and online interactions. Learning in each of these areas built upon one another to holistically improve their understanding of feminism. Within these three realms of education, navigating and critiquing discourses was a key component of their learning. The participants expressed their desire to learn beyond formal education. Online conversations took place in multimodal ways where participants utilized features of

Facebook to shift feminist discourses and increase awareness of feminist issues. Participants contributed to Facebook's discursive landscape through posts, shares, likes, and messages. For the participants, social network sites supported their desire to access conversations that were not readily available to them offline. Importantly, these conversations were subject to similar gendered power relations that structure offline power relations.

Facebook allowed the participants to access information that was not readily available through mainstream media such as television or newsprint. Importantly, the participants all expressed ways dominant media framed feminists as radical, extreme, and bra burners. Social media, such as Facebook, allowed users to regulate and control content that they could access daily. For example, Alana, Darla, and Nina carefully selected pages, people, and groups to follow that would provide them with feminist content. The participants could craft their Facebook pages in ways that allowed them to access information that may otherwise be overridden by trending mainstream content. Ways the participants manipulated their space to acquire feminist information provides insight into ways users of social media such as Facebook may manipulate the space for differing objectives. Users of Facebook who wish to acquire diverse content may do so by manipulating their settings. However, users who do not actively manipulate their Facebook settings may remain enmeshed in dominant discourses that popularly circulate. As such, Facebook itself does not generate critical content, but rather users must actively seek out content that is produced by other users. Importantly, if other users do not produce critical content, it cannot be circulated. Content creation is thus an important component of producing counter-discourses online.

Through their engagement online, the participants were contributors of digital

content. In doing so, the participants shape content, conversations, and discourses on social media sites such as Facebook. Through engaging online, the participants of this research constructed knowledge and community (Conrad & Spencer, 2006). Importantly, while dominant discourses related to gender are often reinforced online (Liddiard, 2014), the participants' digital conversations sought to advocate for social justice and push back, challenge and critique notions of gender. Participants engaged in these conversations to expand their understanding of feminism and circulate critical content. The participants reflect Liddiard's (2014) findings that digital communities may shape and challenge current discourses. As such, producing and circulating counter-discourses on Facebook may be a way to reshape knowledges and understandings of gender. Social media such as Facebook may support social movement learning and reflect Choudry's (2015) understanding of activist milieus that are "terrains of struggle over power, knowledge and ideas, including what constitutes legitimate or authoritative knowledge" (p. 93). The experiences of the participants in this research uncover struggles and attempts to reconstitute knowledge online.

It is important to emphasize that for the participants, reconstituting authoritative knowledge is a struggle. The participants of this study explained that other users ignored or disagreed with the feminist content they circulated online. They felt that they most often received pushback and critique by male users. They were also inclined to be silent for fear of jeopardizing their careers by appearing uninformed, too radical, or performing their gender outside traditional expectations.

Ways Bodies Can Be Materialized Online

This research also considered ways gendered power relations influenced digital performativity. The participants discursively constructed digital identities that they would

use to represent themselves and to engage with other users. Developing a Facebook profile called into account notions of performativity (Butler, 1999) and partialized subjectivities (Haraway, 1991). Specifically, participants' digital profiles included various, intentionally arranged multimedia that was influenced by gender norms related to credibility, beauty, professionalism, and relationships. At times this piecing together is deliberate: done so to convey a message or appeal to an audience. At other times, this piecing is unintentional, and reflect ways users internalize offline gendered norms. Digital profile construction thus becomes yet another materializing practice (Butler, 1993) and social media sites facilitate discursive reproduction of gender norms. Participants discussed ways these gender norms were considered, reflected, or challenged during their profile construction. The experiences of these participants illuminate understandings and processes of performativity online.

With anti-feminist sentiments circulating in society and online (Walby, 2011) and with digital spaces increasingly becoming significant spaces for social interaction, it is important to consider not only gendered power relations but also ways users negotiate and represent these power relations. While digital identities relate to offline identities, digital spaces also "allow for imagined and/or real relief not only from the limitations of embodiment itself but also from the limitations placed upon bodies when they are positioned on the grids of (raced, sexed, normalized) cultural meaning in limiting or oppressive ways" (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 124). As represented through the experiences of the participants in this research, digital spaces are not radically free from oppressive systems of power that regulate subjectivities. Instead, as Herbst (2009) found, female digital identities may be normatively represented, or all together avoided as to avoid backlash and critique. The participants felt pressure to disclose their relationship status

and education. Many also felt pressure to select a profile photo that adhered to feminine beauty expectations, where women must be moderately beautiful and conservative. Alana dealt with gender expectations for visual representations by completely rejecting a digital gender representation and instead selected a photo of a buffalo. Similarly to Herbst (2009), these acts of self-representation uncover ways power relations continually marginalize and oppress female gender identities.

Given the potential for digital spaces to facilitate learning and engagement (Hall, 2012), it is particularly significant that some digital "bodies" are excluded from participation. Despite claims that social media facilitates democratic contribution and creation of knowledges (Hall, 2012), women's digital identities may not have equal access to such engagement. This is especially significant to consider when exploring digital divides and inequitable access to a knowledge economy (Lane, 2017). Findings also illuminate ways these digital divides may be circumvented, albeit at the expense of reinforcing the very gender norms that limited access.

Ways Digital Feminist Solidarity Can Be Created

Hafkin and Huyer (2006) argue that we must promote women's agency so that they become active constructors and disseminators of knowledge within technological spaces. Developing a feminist Facebook group allowed participants a collaborative space for community development and feminist-focused conversations (Jackson, 2007). Post-structural feminists often highlight importance of solidarity (Haraway, 1991; Luke, 1992) and the feminist Facebook group supported this through developing "webs of connections" (Haraway, 1993, p. 191) and "shared conversations in epistemology" (p. 191). With barriers to critical engagement on Facebook through profiles and posts, groups can offer user-controlled spaces for engagement. With misconceptions of

feminism permeating popular media (McRobbie, 2009) and with feminism and gender studies being cut and marginalized in educational contexts (Ringrose, 2013), feminist Facebook groups may offer a space where feminist misconceptions can be challenged and learning about feminist activism can begin.

In exploring how my participants learn about and advocate for feminism through Facebook groups, those interacting, researching, educating, and learning within social network sites may gain deeper understandings of how gendered liberatory spaces online are constructed and maintained through various gendered discourses. Furthermore, while participants shared experiences and information across time and locational borders, they extended this learning to their everyday lives. This research does not claim that the participants engaged in transformative learning, but participants did express that they increased their awareness about current issues related to gender and enjoyed feminist-focused conversations. Increased understanding of gender advocacy within social network sites may thus support understandings of development of transformative digital learning spaces.

Limitations

Facebook offers a space for informal learning; however, this learning is situated within a broader web of power relations. The findings of this research are not without limitations. Namely, this research focused on the experiences of a small group of women who self-identified as feminists. While recruitment did not specify women, it was only women who responded to my call. Furthermore, in using snowball sampling, the participants were those within and one degree removed from my digital social network. While the participants were diverse in their geographical location and age, they were not diverse in the sense that all participants held similar markers of privilege that afforded

them with opportunities to access higher education and technology. Specifically, these participants were generally highly educated in a western education system.

Importantly, the goal of this research was not to inspire change in the participants but to understand the possibilities for digital feminist engagement through social media. This research was not directly tied to participants' involvement in feminist organizations or protests, it instead considered smaller, emerging points of discursive activism.

Although Facebook is an expansive site for research, this research focuses on some participants of feminist Facebook groups. While many different groups exist with diverse aims within Facebook, this research is limited to participants within my network scope. I reminded respondents that they should not feel obligated to participate based on personal relationship with the researcher to ensure no participants felt coerced into participating. This research thus contributes to the growing literature regarding uses of social network sites by offering insight into the experiences of some women using Facebook for feminism. By doing so, this research may uncover possibilities and limitations of Facebook for social movements that are worthy of future exploration. Additionally, while this research is limited to Facebook as its research site, participants' experiences and discourses within the group may overlap or connect with their experiences within other social network sites. As such, findings in this research may be transferable to other digital feminist contexts.

Conclusion: Continued Need for Exploring Gender and
Power Relations in Digital Spaces

When considering online spaces for critical engagement, researchers mustn't idealize digital spaces as a blank slate or empty canvas. Looking at electronic space as

discursively embedded "allows us to go beyond the common duality between utopian and dystopian understandings of the Internet and electronic space generally" (Sassen, 2002, p. 368). While content can be constructed and created through interacting online, power relations were often upheld through peer responses, a lack of posted critical content, and support of heteronormative self-representation. These factors influenced the participants' confidence and willingness to share and interact with feminist issues online, thus at times inhibiting their feminist activism. While critical posts and alternative self-representations contribute to a counter-discourse, the participants are still working within a coded, digital space, regulated by human created computer-generated algorithms. As such, further research should seek to uncover layers of complexity and context that are embedded within digital engagement for users who work to challenge gender norms. Although this research focused on Facebook as the primary site for research, the findings presented here may extend to other social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. While social media platforms are diverse in their specific tools, most Web 2.0 platforms have similar features such as profiles, contacts, and discussion (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). As such, ways these tools are utilized and understood may have similar shared meanings and common use.

Facebook is a pre-structured space established in ways that are predetermined by the creators of Facebook. Digital spaces are coded with meaning and interpretation of how digital tools should be used. These tools have potential to expand critical understanding of feminism and facilitate communities of empowerment.

This expansion of community-based education and informal social movement learning may have significant implications for the broader field of feminism as it

illuminates possibilities. bell hooks (2000a) claims that "we need feminist studies that [are] community-based" (p. 23) and she asks her readers to "imagine a mass-based feminist movement where folks go door to door passing out literature, taking the time… to explain to people what feminism is all about" (p. 23). Perhaps social media such as Facebook may be a platform to support hooks's dream of a mass-based feminist movement, however, achieving this objective will likely require active, sustained, critical, engagement to shift discourses and gendered power relations.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

General Questions
- How would you describe yourself as a woman?
- What influences how you understand yourself as a woman?
- How does gender (the fact that you are a woman) affect your life?
- How is gender represented in your daily life? Describe places where this is represented. How do women and men look and act like in these representations? Are there ever diversions to common representations? How do others receive them?
- Describe a feminist. What do feminists do?
- How did you learn about feminism? What experiences influenced this learning?
- Describe yourself as a feminist. Do you consider yourself a feminist? Why/Why not? How does this connect with your experiences with feminism?

General Facebook questions: Facebook and Learning
- What is Facebook? What do people use it for? Why do you think people use it in the ways that you described? Is there a right/wrong/common way to use Facebook? How did you learn this?
- When did you join Facebook? How has it changed since you signed up?
- Why did you join Facebook? How/does this decision relate to feminism?
- What are your current reasons for using Facebook? Have they changed or stayed the same since you initially signed up? What influenced this?
- How is gender represented on Facebook? Describe places where this is represented on Facebook. How do women and men look and act like in these representations? Are there ever diversions to common representations? How do others receive them? Do these representations connect with your understanding and representation of gender?
- Describe your Facebook profile.
- Describe your process for profile construction. What are some things you consider in this process?
- What types of messages do you post?
- Describe your message posting process. What influences your postings? How do you decide what to post? Explain a time when you posted something that you thought was important. Why did you post it? What considerations did you take into account when posting? How/did people respond? How did you feel? Did this change your considerations for future posts?
- Does gender influence your process? Explain.
- How do you represent your gender on Facebook?
- How/have people reacted to your gender representation?
- Describe a time when you considered gender in your Facebook engagement. (Profile posting, group engagement, photo sharing, etc).

Facebook group description questions
- Describe the Facebook feminist group within which you engage.

- Do you consider this Facebook group to be a feminist group? Why/Why not? What makes a group feminist? What images/words/conversations influence this?
- Why did you join this site?
- What are ways you participate? How did you learn how to participate? Describe an example of your involvement in the group.
- What prevents/enables you to participate?
- What types of topics in the groups most interest you? Who decides on these topics?
- Do you ever disagree with the group? How do you disagree? What happens when you disagree? Is there a benefit/consequence to disagreeing? Describe an example.
- How do you feel when users disagree with you? What do you do? Why? Does being on Facebook change ways you disagree than being face to face?
- Describe a time when you posted in the group. Why did you post it? What considerations did you take into account when posting? How/did people respond? How did you feel? Did this change your considerations for future posts? Would you post similar content on your personal profile? Why/Why not?
- Describe a time when you wanted to post in the group. Why did you did you decide not to post? How may have group members responded? What would have encouraged you to post?
- How/is gender represented in the groups? Describe an example from an image or conversation. How does this connect with your experiences with gender?
- Does gender matter in the groups? Why/why not? Does this connect to gender offline?

Online and offline learning/ feminist activism
- Does the Facebook group support feminism? What does it do? Explain.
- Does the Facebook group align with your perspectives of feminism? Describe an example where your views were reflected/challenged. Do/should everyone in the group agree on feminism? Why/why not?
- Does your engagement on Facebook connect with your engagement off of Facebook? Describe a time when a feminist conversation on Facebook was discussed offline. How was it similar/different?
- What other groups are you a part of? Does your engagement with other groups connect to this group?
- What/can participants learn from engaging in a feminist Facebook group?

Appendix B

Focus Group Question Guide

- Contribute to the group, as you would participate with other Feminist groups. Share any thoughts, media, or experiences that are relevant to enacting online feminism.
- Describe your experience engaging in feminist Facebook groups.
- How do you think others perceive feminism on Facebook?
- What are your thoughts on this article? [Article on Slacktivism and Cyberfeminism]
- http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/03/12/does-slacktivism-work/
- http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/neil-seeman/wisdom-of-crowds_b_4297913.html
- What are feminist Facebook sites used for?
- Describe your experiences as a woman engaged with online feminism.

Appendix C

Exit Interview Guide

- Describe your experiences participating in the focus groups. Provide examples.
- How did you decide what information to share or comment on?
- What are qualities that you look for when participating in feminist Facebook groups? Discuss reasons for participating and barriers to participation.
- What did you think of the articles posted?
- Did you feel welcome in the group? Why/Why not?
- Did you feel comfortable participating in the group? Why/why not? What would have made it more comfortable (if it was not)?
- How did you perceive the other participant's views of feminism?
- Did you learn anything from their views? Describe an example.
- How might you respond to the articles that call cyber feminism slacktivism? Why might articles like this be published?
- What might be some ways that Facebook groups can support feminism? What might strengthen ways that these groups support feminism?
- How are girls/women represented on Facebook? How/does this influence your online behaviour? How/does this influence your engagement in the Facebook groups?
- Look at this feminist blog (also a Facebook group) http://whoneedsfeminism.tumblr.com If you were to make a "who needs feminism" photo, what would you write on it? How/does feminist Facebook groups support this objective? How/do you enact this?