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@GretaThunberg: Navigating Critique and Identity within Youth Climate Activism
on Twitter

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Carina Weadock
June 2020
Advisor: Dr. Christina Foust

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Abstract

Youth climate activist Greta Thunberg sat alone on the steps of the Swedish Parliament building in September of 2018, holding a bold black and white sign and demanding action be taken in the face of the climate crisis. Ever since, her activism and Twitter presence have sparked media attention, catalyzed youth activists globally to organize marches and strike from school, and have drawn critique. This thesis employs McKerrow's (1989) critical rhetoric to uncover dominant discourses within tweets that undermine Thunberg based on identity and to explore the potential that Thunberg's Twitter presence might or might not hold for future youth activist response to similar critique. I highlight implications of Thunberg's Twitter presence on her own and other youth activist's agency and on the collective identity of Fridays for Future, as well as pose questions that Thunberg's Twitter presence raises for the potential of a more intersectional, networked youth climate movement.

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Table of Contents

Chapter One: Greta Thunberg, the Climate Crisis, and Environmental Communication .	1
The Science behind the Climate Crisis	5
Greta Thunberg and Fridays for Future: Growth of Social Movement	7
Environmental and Climate Crisis Communication	14
Youth Activism: Limiting Social Constructions of Youth	19
Introducing the Thesis: Summary of Chapters	26
Chapter Two: Twitter as Site for Inquiry & the Interpretive Stance of Critical Rhetoric	29
Twitter and Movement: Networked, Hybrid Spaces	29
Twitter’s Relationship to Social Movement and Youth Activism.....	33
Rhetorical Stance: McKerrow’s Critical Rhetoric	37
Agency and Identity	41
Methodological Overview of Data Collection	43
Chapter Three: A Barrage of Critique @GretaThunberg	48
Attacking Credibility: Undermining Thunberg’s Youth.....	48
Do You Have a Resume?: Greta Thunberg as Unqualified.....	49
“Youthful” Emotions: Temper Tantrums, Drama Queens, and Delicate Feelings.	53
Greta Thunberg Kills Joy.....	57
“Deeply Disturbed:” Oppressive Notions of Neurodiversity.....	61
Rhetorically Weaponized Misogyny.....	66
Conspiracy: @GretaThunberg in Cahoots.....	68
Chapter Four: #FridaysforFuture: Thunberg as Networked Node.....	81
Science as Agency: Bolstering Climate Activism	82
Greta Thunberg’s Twitter Page as Fridays for Future Network “Node”	87
“We’re Winning:” Collective Identity in Antagonism	94
#Aspiepower: Thunberg Champions her own Identities	97
Ironically Calling Out Critics.....	101
Agency and Collective Identity in Thunberg’s Twitter	110
Chapter Five: Implications beyond @GretaThunberg.....	114
Implications for Youth Climate Activists	117
A Nod to Critical Rhetoric	126
Possibilities for Future Research	131
References.....	134

Chapter One: Greta Thunberg, the Climate Crisis, and Environmental Communication

Given the scope, complexity, and urgency of the climate crisis, the actions of individuals and governments to mitigate impact are crucial and must be timely. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (the IPCC's) 2018 "Summary for Policymakers of IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C," limiting warming to 1.5°C would require "rapid," "far-reaching" and "unprecedented changes" that would drastically decrease human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere ("Summary for Policymakers of IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C approved by governments," 2018). While the science behind the climate crisis is undeniable and straight forward, the climate crisis is also embroiled in complex systems as well as varying ideologies that make taking action political and polarizing. Research on public attitudes and the climate crisis indicates that the "not-surprising politicization" and "institutionalization" of the climate crisis have made and continue to make communicating the climate crisis a "perfect storm" for those striving to effect change (Moser & Dilling, 2011, p. 161).

Nevertheless, youth activists globally have taken action to combat the climate crisis in many ways: marching and writing bold messages on signs in support of saving the planet, communicating to their governmental leaders, and advocating for lifestyle changes towards more sustainable living, among other methods. What began in

September, 2018 with Swedish student Greta Thunberg sitting outside the Swedish Parliament building to demand climate action from her local government has evolved into a much larger youth activist movement: Fridays for Future. Fridays for Future is a global effort to save the planet, and it consists predominantly of youth activists who strike from school each Friday. In the words of Thunberg: “We are not just some kids who are skipping school...this is actually something much bigger. This is a movement and it will not stop....I think we are only seeing the beginning” (Good Morning America, 2019). While Fridays for Future is larger than any individual youth activist, Thunberg is nevertheless the catalyst of the movement. Her large Twitter following of 4.1 million followers and her deep connection to Fridays for Future make Thunberg’s Twitter presence especially important to considerations of social movement, collective identity, and youth activism.

Despite lack of drastic systemic change Thunberg and Fridays for Future call for, Thunberg’s rhetoric and Fridays for Future activists have spurred reactions and acknowledgement from world leaders, have encouraged youth who haven’t participated in activism before to engage, and have changed voting turnout in some areas. German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated on July 17, 2019 that “the seriousness with which Greta, but also many, many other young people, are telling us that this is about their lives, and that their life spans extend further, has led us to approach the matter more resolutely,” (Eddy, 2019). What’s been deemed the “Greta Effect” by *Bloomberg*, is purported to have shifted results in the 2019 Austrian election, in which Green Party numbers rose unexpectedly (Wishart & Krukowska, 2019). According to Austrian Politician Thomas Drozda, “The thematic development really helped the Greens, I’m

thinking here of Greta Thunberg and the climate protests,” (Johnson, 2019). The “Greta Effect,” according to Katrin Uba, a political science professor at Uppsala University who has gathered data on Thunberg’s impact, has particularly encouraged young female activists to speak out for the first time (Dennis, 2019). Greta Thunberg and the effects of her rhetoric are not only inspirational and motivational to youth activists, world leaders, and those who want to ameliorate the climate crisis: they raise questions for rhetorical critics.

Greta Thunberg isn’t the first teenager to respond to an urgent problem, and certainly won’t be the last. We may recall the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Youth International Party, and other college student activists; as well as students of high school age and younger. For example, the Jefferson County, Colorado high school students who protested altered Advanced Placement United States History curriculum meant to amplify “patriotism” and reduce “civil strife,” or the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School students who marched in favor of strengthening gun laws in the wake of the Parkland school shooting (Asmar, 2015). As Gordon (2010) notes, youth activists often face challenges around political and public action that stem from the oppression of youth and discourses that make assumptions about children’s ability to act (Gordon, 2010, p.7). Marginalization of and assumptions surrounding youth activists have implications for agency and for how youth activists engage in movement building.

Due to the urgency of the climate crisis and Thunberg’s prominence individually and within Fridays for Future, her rhetoric is particularly important for analysis and exploring notions of agency within youth activism. This thesis will explore the following questions:

How have critics responded to Thunberg as a key representative of youth climate activism? And how does Thunberg respond to critics? What might we learn from the Twitter exchanges between and about Thunberg as a youth climate activist, as they pertain to youth activism, climate activism, and social change more generally?

I'll use Raymie McKerrow's critical rhetoric as a framework for this thesis. Critical rhetoric "examines the dimensions of domination and freedom as these are exercised in a relativized world" (McKerrow, 1989, p. 91). The goal of critical rhetoric is to "understand the integration of power/knowledge in society" and point to "possibilities for change the integration invites or inhibits." Further, critical rhetoric aims to locate "intervention strategies" that "might be considered appropriate to effect social change" (McKerrow, 1989, p. 91). To do so, I'll center the ongoing rhetorical focus on agency to explore both critique of Thunberg and her Twitter presence in response. Remarkably, critique threatens to diminish Thunberg's "capacity to act" based on her identities (notably, age, gender, and ability). This thesis then considers Thunberg's presence on Twitter as responsive to critique and as bolstering Fridays for Future's resiliency. Despite what seems like constant barrage of critique from powerful, political men, news pundits, seemingly anonymous Twitter users, and "haters," as Thunberg describes them, Thunberg and Fridays for Future have remained active and persistent. As I show through the thesis, Thunberg and the Twitter affordances she wields rhetorically amplify her own agency and that of Fridays for Future youth activists globally.

In what remains of Chapter One, I lay groundwork for the rest of the thesis by giving a brief introduction to the science behind the climate crisis, diving into context surrounding Thunberg's advocacy and the growth of Fridays for Future, and including a

timeline that details important moments in Thunberg's advocacy over the past few years. In Chapter One I also give insight into climate and environmental communication, explore larger societal discourses that impede action in the face of the climate crisis, and present challenges that climate activists face. The rest of the chapter introduces youth activism, gives background on the important role that youth activists play in the climate movement, and previews the other four chapters of the thesis.

The Science behind the Climate Crisis

“We are in the beginning of the...sixth mass extinction...up to two hundred species go extinct every single day.” -Greta Thunberg (The Daily Show with Trevor Noah, 2019)

On September 18, 2019 Thunberg testified before the United States Congress (C-SPAN, 2019). She stated that she did not come to “offer any prepared remarks” and instead attached her testimony: the October 2018 IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 °C (“Special Report - Global Warming of 1.5°C,” 2018). Thunberg submitted the IPCC report because she didn't want Congress to listen to her, she stated that she wanted them to “listen to the scientists and unite behind the science, and then...take real action” (C-SPAN, 2019). It would be remiss to delve further into this thesis without briefly addressing the science behind the current climate crisis, not only to provide critical context surrounding the activism of Thunberg, Fridays for Future, and the climate movement, but to leave no doubt surrounding the importance of climate advocacy due to the urgency of the current global situation.

According to the IPCC's 2018 Special Report, scientists predict global warming to reach 1.5°C somewhere between the years 2030 and 2052 (“Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C Summary for Policymakers,” 2018). Between the years of 2006 and

2015, the mean surface temperature of Earth was 0.87 °C higher than the average over the 1850 to 1900 year period, with estimated anthropogenic (human-caused) warming matching the observed levels of warming within a range of $\pm 20\%$ likelihood. These facts mean that anthropogenic warming is likely the cause of the 0.87 °C temperature increase (“Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C Summary for Policymakers,” 2018).

The predicted warming of 1.5 °C would cause great climate-related risks, the severity of which are dependent on the “magnitude and rate of warming, geographical location, levels of development and vulnerability, and...choice and implementation of adaptation and mitigation” measures (“Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C Summary for Policymakers,” 2018). Adaptation measures entail policy and focus shifts given changing environmental conditions. For example, “managing and restoring natural coastal ecosystems and infrastructure reinforcement” that takes into account sea level rise would be considered an adaptation (“Special Report - Global Warming of 1.5°C,” 2018).

Mitigation measures vary contextually and consist of steps taken to limit global warming to 1.5°C. Examples of mitigation measures include plans and implementation policies set forth to stay within the global carbon budget. These dependencies indicate that global temperature increase will impact and has already impacted varying communities with different levels of severity. Some of these impacts will likely be “long-lasting or irreversible, such as the loss of some ecosystems” (“Summary for Policymakers of IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C approved by governments,” 2018). Social inequality and systems of oppression worldwide amplify effects of the climate crisis, placing greater burdens on marginalized communities from increasingly intense storm systems, natural disasters, and manifold other harmful impacts of global warming. In the

United States, disaster research has proven that these amplified effects fall more intensely on “women, poor communities, and communities of color” (Jacobs, 2019, p. 25).

Quick and drastic action is key to avoiding an increase of 1.5°C of global warming, but as carbon emissions increase, the percentage of emission decrease needed to avoid a temperature increase of 1.5°C rises steeply each year. On January 23, 2020 Thunberg retweeted Carbon Brief’s video that indicates that the carbon budget, or amount of carbon dioxide the world can release into the atmosphere to limit warming to 1.5°C, will be used up within eight years if emission levels don’t fall (Carbon Brief, 2020). Further, the actionable timeframe continues to become shorter with increased fossil fuel use and inaction. Even still, the IPCC’s predictions are considered by many scientists to be “moderate,” and do not take into consideration feedback loops that amplify warming and which have already been set into motion (Thompson, 2020). This reality has shaped the urgency of Thunberg and Friday for Future’s message, and reaffirms the critical need for communication and social movement that puts pressure on governments and those in positions to spark rapid and drastic change.

Greta Thunberg and Fridays for Future: Growth of Social Movement

If you’re a Twitter user who decides to peruse Greta Thunberg’s profile, what you would learn about her from her brief bio is this: Thunberg is a “17 year old climate and environmental activist with Asperger’s #climatestrike #fridaysforfuture #schoolstrike4climate” (Thunberg, 2020). Thunberg’s bio gets right to the point; but behind the purely-descriptive one-liner is the story of a young girl who decided to take a stand, and whose solo school strike blossomed into access to powerful world stages and sparked global youth mobilization for Fridays for Future.

When Thunberg was 8 years old, she became aware of the climate crisis and fell into an immobilizing depression, because, in her own words: “No one seemed to care about these issues” (Democracy Now!, 2019). Around age 11, Thunberg became a climate activist and began to encourage her family to adopt lifestyle changes such as veganism and avoiding air travel to reduce their ecological footprint. Thunberg participated in various protests within the climate movement, and when Martin Hedberg, a Swedish meteorologist and climate activist, gathered a group of youth together to form a plan of action for the planet in 2018, Thunberg decided to go her own way. In a lighthearted February 3, 2019 post, Hedberg described this interaction:

I participated in a phone-meeting with Greta, Bo and others in June 2018. After a while Greta concluded: ‘You are not radical enough. I have to do something myself.’ and then she hung up. She went on to do her thing, her way. For that I am very grateful. #FridaysForFuture (Hedberg, 2019)

Thunberg decided to take things into her own hands for faster change, and began skipping school to protest the Swedish government’s lack of action for the climate. In an interview with *Democracy NOW!*, Thunberg was asked: “You sat outside the Swedish parliament in September every day when all the other kids were in school. What made you decide to go to the Swedish Parliament?” She responded that she was inspired by the #NeverAgain movement and youth in the United States who had refused to attend school in the wake of the Parkland massacre. Thunberg thought that if students began skipping school for the climate “maybe it could make a difference” (Democracy Now!, 2018). Every school day for three weeks, and eventually every Friday beginning on September 7, 2018, Thunberg could be found sitting, rain or shine, with her bold black and white sign reading “SKOLSTREJK FÖR KLIMATET” (school strike for the climate in

Swedish). Fellow students and teachers began to join Thunberg in skipping school, and global media outlets began to pay attention to “Fridays for Future.”

By November of 2018, around 17,000 students in over 24 countries were taking part in Fridays for Future (Elks, 2019). Around this time, Thunberg was invited to speak at the United Nations Climate Talks in Poland (the COP 24), where she chastised world leaders for speaking only of “green eternal economic growth because” they were “too scared of being unpopular” (Connect4Climate, 2018). Thunberg’s tone and messages are often direct, and responders have described her speeches as “authoritative” (Meyer, 2019). Thunberg’s Fridays for Future protests and speeches began steadily spreading across the internet and the globe as activists of all ages and nationalities began to found their own Fridays for Future movements. Some intentionally adopt Thunberg’s direct and urgent language on posters and in hashtags. For example, after Thunberg’s January 2019 address to the World Economic Forum at Davos, protesters worldwide sported bold signs with Thunberg’s summation of the climate crisis: “Our house is on fire” (World Economic Forum, 2019).

In March of 2019, Thunberg was nominated to receive a Nobel Peace Prize, and in August, she sailed across the Atlantic Ocean to New York in a zero-carbon-emission yacht to speak at a climate conference, protest with youth climate activists across North America, and make her way down to Chile to speak at the United Nations Climate Action Summit (the COP 25). The yacht trip was intended to “make a stand” and to continue her years-long devotion to avoiding air-travel. Thunberg stated that she is “one of the very few people in the world who can actually do such a trip,” so she thought, “why not?” (The Daily Show with Trevor Noah, 2019). Beyond speaking at a climate conference in

New York, Thunberg participated in Friday for Future marches around the United States and Canada, met with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, addressed the United States Congress, and visited Standing Rock to meet with indigenous groups who have long been champions of the environment and who have protested against the Dakota Access Pipeline.

But Thunberg's journey down to Chile was cut short when the location of the COP 25 was moved to Madrid, Spain. Initially unaware of how she was going to get to Spain from North America, Thunberg was offered a ride back to Europe with an Australian family aboard a 48-foot long catamaran, *La Vagabonde*. Thanks to *La Vagabonde*, Thunberg made it to Madrid to deliver a biting speech to world leaders, imploring them to focus on the science and reminding them of the importance of equity in achieving the goals set forth in the Paris Climate Agreement.

A few days earlier, *TIME Magazine* had selected Thunberg to be the Person of the Year for 2019. During her interview with *TIME*, she demonstrated another important feature of her rhetoric: uplifting or showing pride in marginalized identities, which will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter Four. Notably, Thunberg has spoken out about how, given context, her Asperger's can be "a superpower." She circulates the Twitter hashtag #aspiepower regularly (Ortiz, 2019). Thunberg stated that her passionate climate activism and devotion to her cause might be due, in part, to her Asperger's: "If I were like everyone else, I would have continued on and not seen the crisis" (Alter et al., 2019).

Thunberg's advocacy is direct, passionate, stirring, and, much like her Twitter bio, doesn't mince words: "I want you to act as if the house is on fire, because it is" (World Economic Forum, 2019). As she stated in her testimony to the United States Congress on

September 18, 2019: “I don’t want you to listen to me, I want you to listen to the scientists and I want you to unite behind the science” (C-SPAN, 2019). Here, Thunberg’s rhetoric characteristically defers herself as a messenger, instead centering science and a deceptively simple conclusion: act now to prevent further disaster. The type of action that Thunberg calls for in her advocacy is unprecedented, and, as she stated in her COP25 speech: “The politics needed do not exist today despite all the fancy words you might hear from world leaders” (UN Climate Change, 2019).

While some may consider the climate crisis to be extremely complex, Thunberg remains steadfast in her assertion that the situation is quite “black and white.” During her speech to the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2020, she stated that despite world leaders’ assertions that “nothing in life is black or white” when it comes to the climate, this is “a very dangerous lie.” Thunberg pointed to the reality that, “either we prevent 1.5C or warming or we don’t,” “either we avoid setting off that irreversible chain reaction beyond human control or we don’t,” and “either we choose to go on as a civilisation or we don’t.” She ended her statement by reaffirming that taking action or not is “as black of white as it gets” (World Economic Forum, 2019). Thunberg has also asserted that taking action on the climate crisis isn’t political, and has refused to endorse political legislation across the globe. Specifically, she has redirected politicians in order to stop them from viewing the climate crisis as a liberal cause. She has condemned political legislation like the European Green Deal, which aims for a carbon-neutral European Union by 2050, as a “surrender,” that doesn’t incite action quickly enough (Kelo, 2020). Thunberg has also pointed out that the politics needed to effectively act on the climate crisis “do not exist today,” (Thunberg, 2019a).

Within calls to “unite behind the science,” Thunberg includes the “aspect of equity” but doesn’t generally go into great detail on it. She has stated that equity is “absolutely necessary to make [the Paris Climate Accords] work on a global scale” and that any proposed plan leaving out equity should also be considered a surrender that “won’t be enough” (Gehrke, 2020).

Thunberg’s message has implications beyond redirecting global leaders to the science behind the climate crisis. It is not only a call for substantive action, but an admonishment for those in power who haven’t mobilized. Thunberg has made it clear that world leaders’ willful inaction in the face of science is deplorable and intolerable. Thunberg, in her September 23, 2019 address to the United Nations Climate Action Summit asked world leaders “How dare (they) look away” despite the science having been “crystal clear” for “thirty years” (PBS News Hour, 2019). Thunberg has also pointed out the irony of receiving accolades for her climate advocacy when needed legislative change has not occurred. On October 29, 2019, she refused to accept the 2019 Nordic Council Environment Prize and stated that “the climate movement does not need any more awards” and that “what we need is for our politicians and the people in power to start to listen to the current, best available science” (Capron & Zdanowicz, 2019). Her message calls for substantial action that fully accepts and takes into account the urgency of the climate crisis and that honors and is guided by information the global scientific community provides.

While Thunberg was a catalyst for Fridays for Future, Fridays for Future campaigns globally are nevertheless self-sustained and unique, as they host their own events and have created individualized, place-based social media presences on Twitter. For example,

youth activists have organized Fridays for Future Pakistan (@Fridays4FutureP) and Fridays for Future - Sierra Leone (@FFF_SierraLeone) among many others (Elks, 2019). In September of 2019, approximately one year after Thunberg began her first independent school strike for the climate, Twitter users began posting pictures from Thunberg's initial 2018 climate strike juxtaposed with overhead photos of Fridays for Future marches in 2019. These photos make clear the difference in scale of Fridays for Future from one year to the next: one solitary protester on the steps of Swedish Parliament presents a dramatic contrast to thousands of people filling wide boulevards.

While Thunberg and Fridays for Future have accomplished what seems to be a great deal since September of 2018, when asked at a Youth Climate Activist Panel at the World Economic Forum what progress she felt has been made over that time, Thunberg answered: "in one aspect lots has happened which no one could have predicted" and that "this has sparked a general awareness and a movement...of many different young people pushing together to form this alliance of movements" (CBS News, 2020). However, from another angle, "pretty much nothing has been done, since the global emissions of CO₂ has not reduced" (CBS News, 2020). Despite the worrying lack of action taken to reduce global CO₂ emissions, Thunberg's rhetoric, speeches, online presence, actions, and presence in Fridays for Future have inspired response. Thunberg has moved people globally, but her direct advocacy isn't all that's enabled her to gain such a vast public platform. Her body, her identities, the networked nature of Fridays of Future on Twitter, and how Thunberg has navigated these have impacted her ability to facilitate movement. Thunberg's Twitter presence, which represents an archive of her rhetorical strategies, presents an opportunity for furthering the study of environmental and climate crisis

communication, as her rhetoric has fostered action that other communication techniques have fallen short of.

Environmental and Climate Crisis Communication

Advocating for the existence of the climate crisis, conveying the gravity of the current situation, and promoting action to be taken for the world's ecosystem is nuanced. The climate crisis is urgent, politically charged, entangled with the world's economic systems, and imbued with various meanings. Communicating about the climate crisis relies on the assumption that "communication is an essential means to link scientists, politicians, and the public, and thus can and should play an important and constructive role in enabling public engagement with climate change" (Moser & Dilling, 2011, p. 162). Environmental communication is broad and expansive, and includes signs sported by protestors in marches, peer-reviewed scientific publications, and everything in between. These communicative methods can be seen as "symbolic action" that shapes meaning, understanding of the natural world, and perceived relationships to the environment (Cox, 2013, p. 19).

Environmental communication surrounding the climate crisis has changed significantly in the past decade, partially due to the shifting "landscape" of society and the rise of social media. According to Susanne Moser, a few notable changes in the years leading up to 2016 include: increased frequency of unusually extreme storms and notably shifting temperatures that have encouraged climate conversations, the IPCC's continual release of reports on the global status of the climate, as well as the increasing number of high-profile political gatherings surrounding the climate crisis (like the United Nations Climate Action Summit or the World Economic Forum) (Moser, 2016, p. 346). Diverse

platforms for discussing the climate crisis that enable robust networks of social movement and information exchange have also altered the way science is communicated. Current and contextualized political and economic rhetorical situations also impact the way that environmental communication occurs or can occur (Moser, 2016, p. 346-347). While 2016 was four years ago, many of the factors, opportunities, and hurdles that Moser asserts have shifted the “landscape” of environmental communication are still relevant to how the climate crisis is communicated.

Those communicating the climate crisis navigate numerous social constructions, or, in the words of Robert Cox, social-symbolic constructions of nature or the environment. Understanding of what is “natural” is central to climate crisis communication, as a person or society’s discourses of “natural” can affect what they consider to be an environmental problem or not (Cox, 2013, p. 62). For instance, climate crisis deniers might, despite swaths of evidence to the contrary, consider global rising temperatures to be a “natural” occurrence that therefore isn’t a problem. Others might believe, with extensive scientific evidence to back up their position, that global temperature increase has been “unnaturally” caused by humans, or is “anthropogenic.” The tumultuous landscape surrounding climate crisis communication might provide opportunities to intervene in understandings of what is “natural” or a “problem.” For instance, those who witness the impact of larger storms than they have seen before might be more inclined to feel a shift in understanding that storm as something that is beyond the realm of what is “natural.”

While climate crisis denial is still shockingly prevalent, a September 13, 2019 poll from the Washington Post indicated that that the majority of Americans view the climate crisis as a “crisis” or as a “major problem” (Dennis, 2019). Leiserowitz et al. (2019)

indicate that “Americans who think global warming is happening outnumber those who think it isn’t by more than a 4 to 1 ratio” (p. 4). However, only fifty-three percent of Americans understand how strong scientific consensus behind the climate crisis is. Lower still is the percentage of Americans who “perceive a social norm in which their friends and family expect them to take action on global warming,” highlighting a lack of felt urgency (Leiserowitz et al., 2019, p. 4).

Beyond identifying environmental problems, communicating the climate crisis requires addressing barriers to understanding the urgency of the climate crisis and to inspire action to bridge the “science-action gap” (Cox, 2013, p. 68; Moser & Dilling, 2011, p. 162). In 2015, environmental communication scholar Phaedra Pezzullo blogged about her experience at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (the COP 21). She wrote about the “latent exigence” she experienced at the COP21 meeting. “Latent exigence,” for Pezzullo, is addressing the climate crisis in a way that leads to a state of “deferral,” as it might seem to have less immediacy or feel more distant: a problem to be addressed later (Pezzullo, 2015). While “latent exigence” remains a hurdle to communication surrounding the climate crisis, as the effects of the climate crisis become more heavily felt, the immediacy of the crisis might become more tangible. “Latent exigence” likely contributes to what Robert Cox calls the “attitude-behavior gap,” which indicates that “although individuals may have favorable attitudes or beliefs about environmental actions, they may not take any action” (Cox, 2016, p. 232).

Inaction in the face of the climate crisis is not only a product of lack of feelings of urgency. “Latent exigency” and the “attitude-behavior gap” are exacerbated by global reliance on fossil fuels, varying relationships to means of production, and the

consumption of natural resources, news that gets broadcast and consumed in a given area or within social groups, and broad societal understandings of “progress” that may put current material gain and efficiency above ensuring resources are protected for later. People in positions of power in industries that rely on the extraction and burning of fossil fuels might understand the urgency of the climate crisis while willfully avoiding action due to monetary gain that would be lost if fossil fuel usage declines or stops. Ironically, those in positions most able to make a large impact on reducing emissions might be some of the least likely to act as they’d likely risk sacrificing personal wealth in doing so. In an address given to the United Nations Climate Action Summit in September of 2019, Greta Thunberg passionately chided world leaders: “We are in the beginning of a mass extinction,” Thunberg said, and “all you (world leaders) can talk about is money and fairytales of eternal economic growth” (PBS News Hour, 2019). In this statement, Thunberg names the lack of action taken by global leaders and highlights a major challenge facing the climate movement today: prioritization of economic growth at the expense of the planet (PBS News Hour, 2019).

Climate scientists, news outlets, and activists have employed multiple frames to combat the “latent exigency” and the attitude-behavior gap that hasn’t yet been overcome with climate crisis communication. By way of example, I introduce a few common frames, many of which are used in combination with each other. As Moser and Dilling (2011) describe, some journalists communicate the climate crisis in ways that “mobiliz(e) by fear” (p. 164). In order to attain a realistic level of urgency that then turns to action and not “latent exigency,” many communicators attempt to convey the dire nature of the climate crisis to impact how important it is to audiences. Urgency has been conveyed via

pictures of massive storms, views of destruction in the wake of catastrophes amplified by the climate crisis, emotional images of species struggling to survive, and so on.

Mobilization by fear might become “apocalyptic” framing when communicators emphasize a “catastrophic end-point that is more or less outside the purview of human agency” (Foust & Murphy, 2009, p. 151).

Apocalyptic frameworks, while they generally convey urgency effectively, could inhibit action due to overwhelming feelings of despair or inevitability that they might cause. Further, apocalyptic framing has also enabled climate crisis deniers to undermine climate activists as “alarmists” who shouldn’t be taken seriously, as demonstrated in the widely-circulated Twitter hashtag #ClimateChangeHysteria (Foust & Murphy, 2009, p. 152). Particularly, conservative audiences may frame apocalyptic or fearful appeals as “manipulative.” Catastrophic or apocalyptic framing may prove counterproductive to moving people to act as it overwhelms the “finite pool of worry,” each person navigates, rendering them immobile, in denial, numb, or apathetic (Moser & Dilling, 2011, p. 165).

Other activists and environmental advocates have employed social progress frames, like neoliberal framing, to inspire climate crisis action. Neoliberal frames emphasize that, despite worries of job loss and economic damage, embracing renewable energy and helping the planet can be economically savvy. Scholars have asserted that climate activists and educators who embrace neoliberal framing “not only undermine...ability to respond to current economic and environmental crises,” but “promote re-regulating society to privilege market transactions and reject pursuit of other collective solutions” (Hursh et al., 2015, p. 301). Neoliberal framing of the climate crisis is limiting, as it offers audiences only a few pathways to action, both of which require reaffirming either

formal political spheres or economic marketplaces. As Nisbet (2009) concludes, social progress frames can help define science-related issues as “a means of improving quality of life,” that might intertwine with frames of morality or ethics to pose science-related issues as “a matter of right or wrong” (Nisbet, 2009, p. 18). As with defining the climate crisis as “unnatural” or an “urgent problem,” social progress frames rely on some degree of shared meaning and worldview. While these frames might effectively move those who can act within their limited scope, social progress frames tend to exclude young people from engagement, complicating an already-complex rhetorical situation for youth climate activists.

Youth Activism: Limiting Social Constructions of Youth

When I wondered aloud whether young people’s rights are underrepresented in the political system, (Thunberg) demurred. “Sometimes it feels that way, yeah,” she said. “The problems we care about the most are usually not the ones that are being prioritized the highest. Young people are very concerned about the climate crisis and ecological crisis, and that is very underrepresented. (Meyer, 2019)

Thunberg, who began her solo protest on the steps of Swedish Parliament at the age of 15, is a youth activist. Youth activists often navigate various societal understandings, assumptions, challenges, and conceptions surrounding what it means to be and behave like a “youth,” what “proper” political engagement looks like for children and society, as well as understandings of what youth activism is or “should” be. These complex notions have implications for the flow of power and agency, a term which I’ll briefly define here and will describe in greater depth in Chapter Two. Agency, according to Campbell (2005) can be thought of as the “capacity to act” or to “have the competence to speak or write in a way that will be recognized or heeded by others in one’s community” (p. 3). While Campbell’s definition here proves scripto-centric, it is useful. Agency is not clear-

cut, as it is “polysemic and ambiguous,” and has been the focus of rhetorical scholarly conversation. Agency is also deeply intertwined with materiality and identity (Wanzer, 2011, p. 344). The various discourses surrounding youth activism impact how youth activists are or are not “recognized” or “heeded” by communities (Campbell, 2005, p. 3).

In this paper, to begin to understand youth activism, I’ll adopt an understanding of age as “a socially constructed category of difference and inequality rather than as a simple reflection of biology” (Gordon, 2010, p. 5). The lack of political power afforded young people due to the assumption that young people are “citizens in the making” (sometimes referred to as the “deficit model”), is a material consequence that stems from inequality based on age (Gordon, 2010, p. 9; Osler & Starkey, 2003, p. 245). To understand the social inequality that comes from the constructions of adolescence is also to shed light on the social construction of adulthood, as one relies upon the other:

studies of youth as reflections of generational inequality focus on the ways in which adolescence, as a social and historical construction, functions to maintain adult identity, value systems, and power, and results in young people’s actual lived realities of political, economic, and social oppression (Gordon, 2010, p. 7).

The deficit model tends to impact female youth activists more greatly than it does young male activists: “Girls are often faced with a general activist identity that devalues their identities as girls, forcing them to do additional identity work to make their identities congruent,” meaning that girls must work to “legitimize a girl identity within their activist identity” (Earl et al., 2017, p. 5).

An array of normative discourses surrounding girls and societal engagement are exemplified in Taft’s (2010) sociological work on girlhood and discourses employed at girl’s organizations surrounding social change and activism. Taft points out that many

organizations pinpoint lack of personal self-esteem as cause for girls' "loss of voice at adolescence," in a discourse that places blame for lack of engagement on girls, rather than society (Taft, 2010, p. 18). Girls who have been exposed to programs that emphasize coping mechanisms to deal with societal barriers imply that "society, the public, and the community are unchanging arenas" and lead girls to focus on "dealing with problems as they exist" while not alluding to "possibilities of social transformation" (Taft, 2010, p. 21). While these are just a few examples of barriers to girls participation in activism, it's clear that being a female youth activist has implications for agency that extend beyond those posed by a youth activist identity.

Further, race and context impact societal expectations surrounding what dominant notions of "girlhood" exist. Gordon and Taft (2010) point to the social expectations of girlhood being "innocent," "dreamy," and "hopeful" as articulated by an upper middle-class girl who is biracial (White/Jewish and Japanese). These expectations serve as example of how "political socialization exists at the nexus of gender, race, and class systems of power and privilege." These expectations, Gordon & Taft point out, are "specifically images that are most often projected onto White, middle-class girls" (Gordon & Taft, 2011, p. 1510). Gordon and Taft (2011) explain further that "these same expectations do not necessarily construct dominant images of girlhood for girls of color and working-class girls" (p. 1510). Despite "low-income youth of color in Oakland" emphasizing the "many problems in their communities that contributed to cynicism and hopelessness," these girls' gender socialization "was also seen as a resource" to them. In the words of one youth, "girls are allowed...to like really care about stuff" whereas boys "are not" within her community (Gordon & Taft, 2011, p. 1510). These examples point to

the nuance surrounding impacts of girlhood and personal understandings of “capacity to act” given the complexities of intersectionality. To summarize, Taft (2009) points to the implications of girlhood on strategies youth activists employ: “Girls’ strategies for political contention are not homogenous or universal but are located in divergent national, racialized and class-specific communities, histories, and social movement cultures” (p. 8).

Beyond navigating notions of what being an adolescent or child means, youth activists also navigate social constructions of youth activism and activist identity broadly. Gordon and Taft question multiple, potentially limiting notions of youth activism and youth political socialization in civic engagement literature. Narratives of youth activists that indicate the normalcy of youth political engagement combat certain misconceptions, for instance: that youth are apathetic when it comes to politics. According to Gordon and Taft (2011), assertions like the “youth apathy crisis” that point to problematic lack of youth civic engagement are inaccurate in part because they assume that metrics indicating high levels of distrust and “lack of admiration” from youth in political systems correlates to lack of care (p. 1501). Further, civic engagement scholars who acknowledge the youth apathy crisis tend to refer to a lack of political action from youth in ways that are “ideal” or that reinforce “formal politics” to produce “good citizens” (Gordon & Taft, 2011, p. 1502).

Youth activist narratives demonstrate material consequences that stem from adult assumption of youth apathy to politics and systems. One such consequence is adults ascribing to notions of youth activist “exceptionalism” that separates youth activists from “typical” young people. As one statement from two white middle-class teen activists

from Vancouver indicates, such divisions articulate “youth with inaction and inability” (Gordon & Taft, 2011, p. 1506). From the testimonies of youth activists in Gordon and Taft’s article, it becomes clear that some youth activists reject the notion of youth “inaction and inability” to take political action, and instead see themselves “as just one of the many youth they know who are involved in social movements and social change” (Gordon & Taft, 2011, p. 1507).

Adults, including adult activists who support the cause of youth activists, often ascribe to notions of “youth exceptionalism” and youth apathy. Adult activists who praise youth activists for being “amazing” produce a “double-edge” that Gordon and Taft (2011) found to uplift students on the one hand, but that “reinforced for these youth organizers that adults *expected* them to be apathetic, hedonistic, individualistic, and self-absorbed” on the other (p. 1506). Additionally, youth activists, especially youth of color, might be seen as a “hot commodity” by adult activists ready to capitalize on “youth voice(s)” that make their own organizations seem “youth-friendly” as a result of youth exceptionalism (Taft, 2009, p. 42). One adult activist from the San Francisco Bay Area stated that “there is competition for youth. They are made to be figureheads and get tokenized by these adult organizations” (Taft, 2009, p. 42). In tokenizing youth activists and elevating their voices as “exceptional,” Taft argues, “the discourse of activism as a form of exceptionalism is ultimately...a discourse of individualism” that undermines the reality of the wide-spread nature of youth activism from girls (Taft, 2009, p. 44).

While youth are “materially and existentially threatened by the decisions and actions of other individuals, companies, or states” in numerous ways, the climate crisis poses a threat that will affect youth to a greater extent and for a longer period of time than it will

the adults who currently wield political power (O'Brien et al., 2018, p. 42). In an interview with Trevor Noah, when asked “Why do you think young people are so focused on climate change now?” Thunberg responded:

I think it is because, we, in a way, feel like it is a more direct threat. Others feel like ‘I won’t be alive then, anyway, so screw it,’ but we...actually know these consequences will face us during our lifetime, and it is already happening now (The Daily Show with Trevor Noah, 2019).

For youth, impacts of deferred action on the climate crisis are grave, and succumbing to “latent exigency” might seem like less of an option (Pezzullo, 2015).

Despite the increasingly intense impacts youth will face due to the climate crisis, young people remain almost entirely excluded from formal political power and platforms. But this lack of formal political power doesn’t stop youth climate movement activists from persistently fighting for their futures in numerous, creative, and powerful ways that affect “formal” political spheres. Lack of formal political power might uniquely position youth activists to avoid some of the pitfalls of communicative framing of the climate crisis described above. For instance, youth activists might be less likely to adopt frames that reaffirm current institutions (for example, neoliberal framing), or they might be less likely to promote action that only those with institutional power have access to (such as deciding where to spend money or whom to vote for).

While many youth activists are entirely excluded from formal political spaces, Thunberg has spoken about the climate to world leaders at the United Nations, has been invited to testify before the United States Congress, and has had meetings with politicians of numerous nationalities. Her limited political platform on a global stage has likely been due, in-part, to misguided notions of “youth exceptionalism” that elevate Thunberg out of

dominant notions of “normal” white girlhood and youth apathy and into the praise associated with “exceptional” youth activists.

Thunberg is part of a long line of youth activists who have been taking action to save the planet. Especially indigenous youth and youth of color across the globe have been speaking out against governments, corporations, and industries that harm the environment, ignore the science behind the climate crisis, and put conceptions of economic growth above health. Youth have been at the forefront of protests against environmental injustice, environmental racism, and exploitation of natural resources and have led initiatives that promote sustainability, recycling, and care for the planet. Some examples of ongoing climate movement youth activism include: the One Mind Youth Movement, a group of young Lakota Sioux who organized a campaign against the expansion of the Keystone XL pipeline through their land at Standing Rock, Amariyanna Copeny, or “Little Miss Flint,” who has protested ongoing environmental racism in Flint, Michigan, where the community still doesn’t have access to clean drinking water, and Licypriya Kangujam, who in 2015 began her campaign for climate action, and in July of 2018 founded an organization called “The Child Movement” that aims to help protect the rights of children and promotes India enacting climate law.

In conclusion, I posit that the “latent exigency” Pezzullo identifies as a barrier to quick action dovetails with much of the “exceptional” qualities attributed to youth in climate activism. Thunberg has stated that she becomes annoyed when people say “Oh you children, you young people are the hope. You will save the world” (Sengupta, 2019). As adults frame youth movements and young climate activists as the “antidote” to the world’s ills, or as saviors of the planet, they enable further inaction on the part of adults.

Tied up with notions of youth exceptionalism, rhetoric of youth saving the world places impetus on children who are considered to be “citizens in the making:” once again enabling adult deferral of action on the climate crisis (Gordon, 2010, p. 9). Yet, youth are demanding that action be taken immediately. Rhetorical critics and advocates have much to learn by attending to youth climate activists’ demands and the strategies they employ to increase their own agency for the purpose of combating “latent exigency.”

Introducing the Thesis: Summary of Chapters

Having now introduced the concerns and foci of this thesis, Chapter Two introduces Twitter as a platform for activism and social change. The chapter outlines Twitter’s architecture and some of the “affordances” that the site provides to users and to members of social movements (Foust & Drazner Hoyt, 2018, p. 42). As Twitter’s widespread usage provides a landscape for the facilitation and creation of networked social movements, Chapter Two also provides context surrounding how other movements and youth activists have used Twitter to organize and facilitate social change. The methodology used to collect fragments analyzed in Chapters Three and Four is also introduced here, as are the key concepts of agency and identity. Finally, I elaborate on the importance of critical rhetoric, and how the critique of domination and critique of freedom position my analysis, writing, and hopes for this research.

Chapter Three provides thematic analysis of tweets critical of Thunberg and these discourse’s attempts to diminish Thunberg’s agency. I perform a rhetorical criticism building on McKerrow’s critique of domination, a method of critical rhetoric that aims to elucidate how “discourse is mobilized to legitimate the sectional interests of hegemonic groups” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 93). In Chapter Three, I explain each theme of critique and

point to how each functions rhetorically to reduce Thunberg's agency, reinforce dominant identities, and threaten to reaffirm marginalization.

After providing insight into themes of critique Thunberg faces, Chapter Four dives into how Thunberg's use of Twitter both directly and indirectly responds to critics, how her Twitter presence reaffirms and bolsters Fridays for Future through spreading of agency, and how Thunberg utilizes Twitter's "affordances" to enable a resilient collective. This chapter features McKerrow's critique of freedom, which provides understanding of how Thunberg increases her own "*freedom to pursue other power relations*" and the freedom for her followers to do the same (McKerrow, 1989, p. 75). Entangled with notions of agency, the critique of freedom in Chapter Four illuminates how Thunberg creates possibility for herself and for Fridays for Future to more fully engage their personal "capacti(ies) to act" in the face of critique (Campbell, 2005, p. 3).

Chapter Five synthesizes Chapters Three and Four by putting the two chapters into larger rhetorical conversation with one another, to explore how critique fosters a conservative echo chamber, and to investigate how Thunberg's Twitter presence inoculates herself and her followers from being heavily impacted by targeted identity-based critique. This chapter also articulates how Thunberg's use of Twitter in combination with her identity creates possibility and raises questions for Fridays for Future, youth activists, and climate crisis communicators. Finally, Chapter Five explains the importance of critical rhetoric to this thesis and suggests avenues for future research.

My hope for the final chapter, as for the thesis more broadly, is to pinpoint implications that stem from the critique of domination and critique of freedom performed. Within discussion of the critique of domination, I hope to "unmask" the

“integration of power/knowledge” present in tweets critical of Thunberg to point to dominant discourses that youth climate activists might be subject to broadly, with the hope of speaking toward an “emancipatory effect” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 91). I also hope to summarize and conclude with “possibilities for change that integration (of power/knowledge) invites or inhibits” that Thunberg’s Twitter presence exemplifies in “intervention strategies” that “might be considered appropriate to effect social change” and impact agency (McKerrow, 1989, p. 91).

Chapter Two: Twitter as Site for Inquiry & the Interpretive Stance of Critical Rhetoric

The genre of Twitter and tweet(s) as text for analysis provide a rich site for inquiry, and has been a scholarly focus surrounding social movement. Twitter's unique affordances, described in part below, have also been explored, as has Twitter's potential to pre-empt tone or type of engagement. Youth activists, excluded from formal political spheres, have found Twitter to be fertile ground for engaging in advocacy, spreading ideas, planning marches and strikes, and building collective identity. This chapter then details McKerrow's critical rhetoric, which will be used as my interpretive stance. Critical rhetoric organizes my approach to the Twitter analysis here and has, along with intersectionality, helped to facilitate the critical practice this thesis embraces. Chapter Two will attend to critical rhetoric's relationship to agency, as agency is a primary guiding lens for this rhetorical analysis. Finally, I'll detail my method of data collection.

Twitter and Movement: Networked, Hybrid Spaces

When a Twitter user posts, their message, which has to be below the maximum 280 characters, can be seen by those who follow the Twitter handle, and, if their account is "Public," even those without their own Twitter account or who don't follow the handle can see the post. Once a tweet has been posted, followers and other Twitter users have the option to "Like" a tweet, "Reply" to it, or "Retweet" the post with or without adding their own content. When Twitter users retweet, use a hashtag, or put forth a post of any

form, they address a generalized other, a set of “distant addressee(s)” (their followers and beyond, in some instances) (Baxter, 2011, p. 31). These distant addressees “preclude ownership by an individual speaker” as the expression of an utterance is “constructed as much by the anticipated listener as by the particular speaker” (Baxter, 2011, p. 31). This “anticipated listener” has a set of values that are pre-assumed and reflect discourses “circulating in the culture at large, which are given symbolic life when voiced by speakers” (Baxter, 2011, p. 50).

According to Ott (2017), media usage is moving into an “Age of Twitter” that “promotes public discourse that is simple, impetuous, and frequently denigrating and dehumanizing” (p. 60). Ott asserts that “danger arises” from Twitter when “issues of social, cultural, and political import are filtered through the lens of Twitter, for Twitter infects public discourse like a social cancer” that “destroys dialogue and deliberation, fosters farce and fanaticism, and contributes to callousness and contempt,” (Ott, 2017, p. 60). In other words, Twitter holds potential to be a dialogically-contractive medium, one that undermines dialogue and “challenge(s) alternative discourses for purposes of marginalizing, and even silencing” (Baxter, 2011, p. 170). Further, Twitter can lead to impulsivity and incivility, and can foster hyper-partisanship (Ott, 2017, p. 93 - 94).

Other scholars, such as Doug Tewksbury, call for nuanced in understanding of the potential for social movements’ use of social networking:

Those heralding the dawn of the ‘Twitter Revolution’ or the ‘Facebook Revolution’ ...commonly offer overblown accounts that tend to essentialize the nature of the specific circumstances, community, and lived experience of any online social movement, while subsequently creating a myopic narrative that discounts or ignores the effectiveness, and indeed, the risk, of offline gatherings in space (Tewksbury, 2018, p. 56).

To Tewksbury, Twitter and online communicative platforms should be understood more broadly, without zeroing in on a specific movement and without understanding social media as inherently disconnected from offline spaces.

When Twitter users tweet or recirculate Twitter content, rarely are they addressing only their followers. Due to the increasing prevalence and visibility of the platform, Twitter activity might be spread through other forms of media, might connect to varying swaths of users through use of hashtags, and may be in reference to, in response to, or the catalyst for occurrences outside of Twitter's platform (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015, p. 934). The "online-offline flows of knowledge and information," in combination with the "affective connections that build communities of practice," can create a space that is a hybrid form of interacting (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015, p. 934). For example, when Thunberg traveled to Bristol in February of 2020 for a climate strike, she posted that she was "Heading for the UK! This Friday, the 28th, I'm looking forward to joining the school strike in Bristol! We meet up at College Green 11am! See you there! @bristolYS4C" (Thunberg, 2020a). This tweet helped to facilitate participation in an offline event. Thunberg then documented the event on the day it occurred through a Twitter post including pictures of the march and the caption: "School strike week 80. At least 30'000 people in the pouring rain today in Bristol! #fridaysforfuture #schoolstrike4climate #climatestrike" (Thunberg, 2020b). Postings like this, that document an event with text and media, convey the atmosphere of the event for those who weren't there, and also enable new meaning to be retroactively created from the event as followers return to the post. These hybrid spaces "generate not only ideas,

knowledge, narratives, and information,” but “serve as a platform for affective exchange” (Tewksbury, 2018, p. 55).

Through retweets and hashtags, Twitter can facilitate a “porousness between publics,” which enables the rapid transfer and elevation of content, and can be regarded as a “multi-referential discourse system” that links users to content, other accounts, and other networks (Jackson and Foucault Welles, 2015, p. 935; Walter et al., 2019, p. 697). Theories of media ecology shed light on the “hybrid” nature of online media spaces and point to the convergence of human agency and technological architecture. Media ecology understands “media as collaborative spaces where human agency and technological affordances converge” and where a “conceptual space for social/cultural forces and contexts within our appraisal of technology use” emerges (Alfonzo & Foust, 2019, p. 99).

Further, Twitter, according to Shirky (2008), has fostered “mass amateurization” of media that sidesteps the gatekeeping of formal journalism and decreases cost of organizing and mobilizing collective action (Shirky, 2008 in Jackson & Foucault Wells, 2015, p. 934). This “mass amateurization” has enabled grassroots communities to “expand collective consciousness and action” (Tewksbury, 2018, p. 55). According to Tewksbury (2018), the first step to “being together” as a political body or activist group is the “feeling-together” that can be provided through the affective connections that are possible via the interconnectedness of social media sites like Twitter (p. 55). Twitter and other forms of social media might have a “catalytic effect” that can “enhance (if not ignite) the potential power of rhetorical framing to move society” through their many “affordances,” including their networked nature and quick facilitation of information spreading (Foust & Drazner Hoyt, 2018, p. 41; Alfonzo & Foust, 2019, p. 110).

Twitter's Relationship to Social Movement and Youth Activism

“Social movements are neither concrete objects, such as a poster calling for a demonstration, nor palpable subjects, such as an association of members” (Foust & Drazner Hoyt, 2018, p. 41)

The question of what a social movement or social movement is, is a rather complex one with multiple answers depending on what scholarship you're reading or who you might be talking to. In this paper, social movement will be understood not from a functionalist perspective, but from a constitutive one. A functionalist perspective might investigate how resources are mobilized within a social movement, which relies on the assumption that collectives must “exist” before they can mobilize or act to persuade. A constitutive approach assumes that “the constitution of a collective or what people identify as ‘a social movement’ is a key effect of rhetoric, so movements are not agents that preceded and make use of persuasion” (Foust & Drazner Hoyt, 2018, p. 41). Further, a constitutive approach to social movement considers that “collective identity may be constituted in a variety of ways, especially via identifications of friends versus enemies” (Foust & Drazner Hoyt, 2018, p. 41). Collective identity, further, will be considered here to be a “process” with a focus on “how a collective forms” (Foust & Drazner Hoyt, p. 41). Adopting a constitutive approach is especially apt for understanding youth activism as it better “captures the fluidity, dynamism, and entanglements of networked publics” that youth activists frequently utilize (Foust & Drazner Hoyt, 2018, p. 41).

Functionalist, resource-mobilization models of social movement theory often revolve around assumptions of movement's hierarchical organizational structure. Foust and Drazner Hoyt (2018) state that “prevailing social movement theories formulated largely

by Western social scientists” tend to “ignore activism led by youth and women by assuming the need for hierarchy within social movements” (p. 39). Past scholars have assumed that movements “seek (U.S.-style) rights and freedoms” with the goal of getting these institutionalized or of realizing “democracy” in some way (Foust & Drazner Hoyt, 2018, p. 39). Due to global political marginalization of youth and that youth activism typically occurs outside the realm of formal political spaces and institutions, social movement that involves youth activists might be less likely to adhere to a hierarchical structure or aim to achieve some form of institutionalized goal. The lack of hierarchical structure and the greater likelihood that youth activism will occur outside the realm of formal political institutions opens the possibility for social change that rigid internal structure or narrow definitions of what “a social movement is,” might otherwise stifle.

Through the interconnectedness that social media provides, activists might be more easily able to complicate or disrupt notions of whose voices are “influential” in movements, and has enabled activist collectives to combat traditional constructions of “leadership” (Jackson & Foucault Wells, 2015, p. 934). However, this doesn’t mean that leadership and individual identities don’t matter to the online activities of social movements. Tewksbury (2018) states that the interconnectedness of media like Twitter relies on autonomous forms, and that scholars need to go further than “understanding the role of the individual within a community” (p. 57). Instead, Tewksbury (2018) reminds that “it is the individual that is at the center of interconnectedness, the active producer whose act of communicating is as important as the content, itself” (p. 57).

While Twitter fosters a network of connectedness, can enable an affective feeling of togetherness, and can help motivate collective action, each act on Twitter also implicates

individuals who communicate as the “producer(s)” of content. Alfonzo and Foust (2019) indicate that socially-mediated engagement shares two “potentialities:” the “building of “political consciousness” by spreading an “argumentative kernel” capable of being “expanded and elaborated far beyond the imagination of any one producer,” and, simultaneously, the “constituting of individuals as part of political subjects” (p. 90). While some Twitter users remain anonymous, have multiple accounts, or may be bots (software designed to produce content or behave like a Twitter user), certain accounts, like that of Greta Thunberg, implicate the body and identities of the individual who communicates on the platform while concurrently connecting individuals to collectives.

To understand Twitter is to take into consideration a broad spectrum of how the platform has been used by various social movements, accepting that in some instances, the “denigrating and dehumanizing” rhetoric that it occasionally enables can “infect public discourse” (Ott, 2017, p. 60). However, to attribute inherent lack of potential for dialogic interaction to Twitter risks ignoring the full scope of Twitter’s societal influence, reach, and potential to spark conversation, as well as silences and minimizes the actions of social movements that have used the platform to combat dehumanization. Further, it becomes clear from looking at certain social movements’ use of the platform, that Twitter use also has potential to harness humor and farce, wield the seemingly “simple” 280 characters to undermine formal conceptions of “civility” to expose corruption, form solidarity, critique systems of power, and create a more nuanced view of what dialogic interaction can mean.

Shirky’s (2008) concept of the “mass amateurization” of media makes sites like Twitter a particularly fruitful ground for youth activism (Shirky, 2008 in Jackson &

Foucault Wells, 2015, p. 934). According to Gordon (2010), “adolescent activism often takes place...away from adult society and larger adult publics” (p. 11). Politically marginalized and typically assumed invisible as political actors, youth can use “mass amateurized” and increasingly political social media sites to deconstruct or ignore the perceived separation that accompanies “social and spatial segregation from the world of adults” (Gordon, 2010, p. 11).

Indeed, youth activists have used Twitter to facilitate marches, build expansive networks, and generate powerful, material response. Thunberg has said that the Parkland, Florida students, who, in 2018, began the Never Again MSD movement, were a source of inspiration to Fridays for Future. Also known as #NeverAgain or #EnoughIsEnough, the Never Again movement started as a Facebook support group among student survivors of the 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting, during which seventeen students and staff members were killed. The #NeverAgain movement spread widely geographically and on social media, and resulted in March For Our Lives, a massive student-lead march that occurred in Washington D.C. The #NeverAgain movement resulted in Florida’s creation of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act, which includes increased background checks and which raised the legal age for purchasing firearms from eighteen to twenty-one years old (“Never Again MSD,” 2018). Twitter helped enable the Parkland students, including prominent youth activists like David Hogg, Sarah Chadwick, and Cameron Kasky, to spread their message rapidly and broadly to create change.

Youth activists within the climate movement have also used Twitter for their activism. The Sunrise Movement, started by high school and college students, advocates

for the climate crisis to be the most important issue for the 2020 United States presidential election and advocates for legislation that benefits the climate. Despite Twitter disallowing political paid advertisements, the Sunrise Movement continues to sustain wide reach among young people on Twitter. According to Aracely Jimenez-Hudis, the digital media manager for Sunrise, “We’ve been able to reach young people and mobilize them and have people recognize that as young people we do have an incredible amount of political power,” and that “our social media is the number one way that we reach new young people and bring them into the movement” (Calma, 2019).

Given youth activists’ widespread use of Twitter to grow movement and enable action, the site is one that provides opportunity for rhetorical scholars. McKerrow’s critical rhetoric provides an important means to critically reflect on tweets in order to explore them beyond their text and to better understand how Twitter usage impacts youth climate activism.

Rhetorical Stance: McKerrow’s Critical Rhetoric

Within rhetorical criticism “a variety of concepts have served as the object of reflective inquiry: prudence, power, decorum, public memory, agency and/or subjectivity,” and numerous examples of “rhetorical scholars engaging in conceptual reflection and refinement as part of the practice of criticism” can be found (Jasinski, 2001). Critical rhetoric, situated within rhetorical criticism, can be understood in part by unpacking McKerrow’s “critical turn.” McKerrow’s “critical turn” posits rhetorical criticism as “*embodied practice*” in which bodies “participate in the creation of meaning,” as opposed to a practice of “passive observation with its corollary privileging of distance and presumed objectivity” (McKerrow, 1993, p. 52). Catalyzed by the work

of cultural studies, queer theory, and post-structuralism, the shift from “highly depersonalized ‘objective’ voice,” to focus on embodied practice underscores the importance of a critic’s *telos* (or continual, perpetually changing purpose) to rhetorical criticism (Blair, 2001; Ono & Sloop, 1992, p. 48). Ono & Sloop (1992) highlight the importance of McKerrow’s critical rhetoric’s commitment to self-criticism and creation of a “position of critical and political agency for the rhetorical critic,” that an “effective critical rhetoric should also highlight the critic’s role in forwarding her own critical beliefs,” thereby suggesting *telos* as *praxis*.¹

McKerrow’s (1989) critical rhetoric is a guiding framework for my analysis. One of the goals of critical rhetoricians is to “unmask or demystify the discourse of power” (Kearl, 2015, p. 67). In exploring critical responses to Thunberg, I will use McKerrow’s critique of domination. The critique of domination focuses on rhetorical criticism of discourses of power which “create and sustain the social practices which control the dominated” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 92). The focus of critique of domination to reveal how “discourse is mobilized to legitimate the sectional interests of hegemonic groups” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 93). According to McKerrow (1989), the discourse which “flows from” or “expresses” power “functions to keep people ‘in their place’ as a status is defined and determined by the interest of the dominant class in maintaining its social role” (p. 96). To this end, McKerrow’s critique of domination serves to reveal the

¹ As someone who is passionate about the climate and who sees the need for urgent systemic change, exploring means to move people for the climate is very important to me. Greta Thunberg and Fridays for Future represent some of the most widespread social movement for the climate that I’ve seen in my lifetime. Within this purpose, my identities as a rhetorical critic must be taken into account. As an adult, white, heterosexual, cisgender female from the United States, I hope to navigate these identities reflexively in my work.

“institutionalized rules” practiced by the dominant classes to “regulate the rhetorical practices and actions of the oppressed” (Kearl, 2015, p. 67).

Contemporary critique of domination demands an intersectional approach, as systems of oppression are overlapping and create complex and varying experiences for people of different identities. This thesis will mobilize Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality as a lens, a heuristic, and as “a tool to interrogate and intervene in the social plane” that will enable a richer engagement with identity as part of the critique of domination (Cho et al., 2013, p. 787). Intersectionality was introduced by Crenshaw in 1989 as a metaphor that focused on the “vexed dynamics of difference and the solidarities of sameness in the context of antidiscrimination and social movement politics” and pointed to the harm of “single-axis” thinking (Cho et al., 2013, p. 787). This “single-axis” thinking, intersectionality points out, leads to lack of understanding of how “systems and logics of oppression” often “materialize as particularly disenfranchising for those that experience multiple oppressed identities” (Kearl, 2015, p. 67). Intersectionality takes social construction and systems of power into account when looking at individual identities and insists on “examining...dynamics of difference and sameness” as embedded within “axes of power” (Cho et al., 2013, p. 787). Examining and exposing power and domination requires viewing these topics through an intersectional lens.

According to Kearl (2015), a thorough critique of domination consists of three strategies. The first is to analyze and classify relevant ideologies through a collection of “fragments” of rhetorical production. In this case, the “fragments” consist of collections of Twitter postings targeting Thunberg’s identity in their critique of her and content from Thunberg’s Twitter page. I classified these “fragments” through thematic analysis that

aims to “reveal how power is convening” (p. 67). Second, I understand power here as able to “flow through a matrix” instead of being a “zero sum calculation.” Finally, Kearnl’s (2015) third strategy encourages critics to “reveal the complex functions of power” through the understanding that “domination is only a fraction of power” (p. 67). I’ll try to present a nuanced view of power throughout, as one of the goals of this work’s focus on identity, agency, and my employment of McKerrow’s critique of freedom is to complicate notions of the flow of power surrounding Thunberg and her critic’s rhetorical expression on Twitter.

For McKerrow, demystifying power would be incomplete without addressing freedom. McKerrow’s critique of freedom revolves around never-ending skepticism and permanent criticism that results from the ebb and flow of power in new social relationships (McKerrow, 1989, p. 96; Kearnl, 2015, p. 67). McKerrow’s critique of freedom is rooted in the work of Foucault, and its goal is to create an atmosphere of freedom that is “always agitated by permanent criticism” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 96). This freedom, for McKerrow, enables new possibilities for thought and action, linking the critique of freedom to an enabling and/or stifling of agency.

In practice, a critique of freedom can take many forms, one of which might be an analysis of a discourse’s accomplishments that the critic then leaves open to interpretation and further critique. While the critique of domination implies an attempt at “*freedom from* powers of oppression,” the critique of freedom implies “*freedom to* pursue other power relations” (McKerrow, 1991, p. 75). Given youth activists’ complex navigation of political marginalization and the implications for agency that stem from discourses of youth (among and in concert with discourses of other marginalized

identities), critique of freedom becomes especially salient. The critique of freedom, according to Kearl (2015), allows critics to explore potential to act without relying on “injustice or inequality in social relations that are over-determined by power” (p. 67). My application of critique of freedom here involves a deep-dive into agency in Thunberg’s rhetoric on Twitter to understand how she creates possibilities for thought and action both for herself and for Fridays for Future.

Agency and Identity

On Twitter, with every communication, Thunberg creates and recreates a constructed identity that reflects onto herself and, in some instances, extends to those who identify as a part of Fridays for Future. Identity construction and navigation is complicated, inextricable from the body, and co-constitutive of agency, movement, and power. Social change scholars, like Pason, Foust, and Zittlow Rogness (2017), have investigated identity, specifically collective identity, in terms of social movement and agency, and detail the complex overlap of these within the field of communication studies:

...for communication scholars studying social change, identity can be synonymous with *agency* (the sense that one is capable of acting, effectively making social change), with *collective consciousness* (as one identifies with shared values, meanings, or/and goals), with *standpoint* (one’s positionality within and without different material discourses such as race, class, gender, sex, sexuality, and nation), and with unique forms of *social relationality* (including friend-enemy relationship, networks, or figures of collective subjectivity) (Foust et al., 2017, p. 9).

Concepts like agency, collective consciousness, and so on will be understood in this thesis as notions that aren’t synonymous, but instead interweaving, co-constitutive, and which impact and are impacted by social movement.

Critical rhetoric positions scholars to aid activism by helping shine a light on systems of dominance that impact agency, relationality, and collective identity, as well as amplify

possibilities for deconstructing those systems of dominance and/or creating new social orders. Agency as the capacity for action is a nuanced key term within critical rhetoric, and will be one of the main interpretive heuristics for my analysis. One of the most deceptively complicated articulations of agency that will be pointed to throughout this work is that agency is the “capacity to act,” (Campbell, 2005, p. 3). Karlyn Kohrs Campbell’s (2005) framework of agency acknowledges how “authors/rhetors are materially limited, linguistically constrained, historically situated subjects,” yet “are ‘inventors’ in the rhetorical sense, articulators who link past and present, and find means to express those strata that connect the psyche, society, and world, the forms of feeling that encapsulate moments in time” (p. 5). To Campbell (2005), agency can be constitutive of identity, and/or it can be an “invention, including the invention, however temporary, of *personae*, subject-positions, and collectives,” (p. 5). Here, Campbell asserts that agency can, to some extent, be constitutive of individual and collective identity. Agency is, to Campbell, “communal and participatory,” “constituted and constrained by externals that are material and symbolic,” emerges as “artistry or craft,” is “effected through form,” and is inherently “perverse” or “open to reversal” (p. 2).

To end with Campbell’s conceptualization of agency risks negating the impacts and materiality of identity, which is where Darrel Enck-Wanzer’s (2011) intervention becomes essential, as it emphasizes agency’s relation to and entanglement with location, material means, and with identities like race, gender, sexuality, and so on. Wanzer (2011) states that agency fluctuates given context and relationality within systemic inequality: “agency functions not outside of power relations, but from a position opposed to,

unintended by, and (to a certain degree) unintelligible to those acting from strategic positions” (p. 351). For Wanzer, the “capacity to act” is affected by and affects identity:

Identity and agency are enmeshed in a complicated and complicating process filled with tensions, paradoxes, and polysemic enunciations, which address the various ways in which agency authorizes and undermines competing identities and politics (Wanzer, 2011, p. 356).

Wanzer points to how identity’s impact on agency becomes part of expression and ways of understanding, creating place and context-based intelligibility within communities that enable agency. Wanzer quotes Shome (2003) to point out that “instead of treating identities as though they occur on the head of a pin, we have to recognize that identities occur not just anywhere, but *somewhere*” and that “social agency is derived not just anywhere but *somewhere*.” Wanzer extends Shome (2003) to assert that perhaps more importantly than “*somewhere*” are considerations of “*some way*,” contending that before rhetorical critics can “fairly address the implications various identity constructions have on resistance, we ought to consider how material culture...rhetorically reconstitutes agency in fundamental ways” (Wanzer, 2011, p. 349). Campbell (2005) and Wanzer (2011), taken together, make clear the complexity and embodied nature of the “capacity to act,” which provides a rich lens for analysis that will help guide my rhetorical goal of “unmask(ing) or demystify(ing) the discourse of power” (Kearl, 2015, p. 67).

Methodological Overview of Data Collection

In the next three chapters, I aim to explore the following questions, mentioned in Chapter One: How have critics responded to Thunberg as a key representative of youth climate activism? And how does Thunberg respond to critics? What might we learn from

the Twitter exchanges between and about Thunberg as a youth climate activist, as these pertain to youth activism, climate activism, and social change more generally?

To begin to answer these questions, I gathered and analyzed tweets, explored Thunberg's shifting Twitter bio through online news articles, and collected retweets and Twitter-related rhetorical content from Thunberg's Twitter page. I also analyzed tweets from Thunberg's critics on Twitter.² The dates of tweet collection, between January 31, 2019 and March 31, 2020, include lots of events, marches, speeches, travel, and noteworthy events that involve Greta Thunberg, Friday's for Future, and critics. I use a methodology that was inspired by the critical intersectional analysis proposed by Kearl (2015). In Chapter Three, I follow the three-step process outlined by Kearl (2015) for performing McKerrow's critique of domination. Kearl's first step is to analyze and classify relevant ideologies through a collection of "fragments" of rhetorical production (p. 67). In this case, the "fragments" consist of Twitter activities from Thunberg and her critics between January 1, 2019 and March 31, 2020.

While Chapter Three breaks down identity-based critique thematically, this paper takes an intersectional approach to identity, as mentioned earlier. Although each criticism in Chapter Three often highlights what seems like one aspect of Thunberg's identity, other aspects of her identity are also implicated because of the inextricable nature of intersecting marginalized identities, which I aim to make clear in my analysis to avoid the harm of "single-axis" thinking (Cho et al., 2013, p. 787).

² I considered questions of research ethics based on Townsend & Wallace (2016). All tweets included were posted by public Twitter accounts and considerations of risks due to publication were taken into account.

I use advanced searches to collect critique for each month from January 2019 through March 2020. The first advanced search for every month included “Greta Thunberg” in the “Any of these words” search function, which included results containing either the proper noun “Greta” or “Thunberg.” The minimum amount of likes was set to 100 for each search, and dates were set from the beginning of one month to the first day of the next month. I chose a minimum number of likes to narrow the search and identify tweets that have circulated somewhat broadly, while also including comments from Twitter users who may not have a large Twitter following. I sifted through all results provided in the “Top,” “Latest,” “Photos,” and “Videos,” categories for each search, identifying and collecting each post critical of Thunberg. I also performed advanced searches of tweets that included “Thunberg” in the “All of these words” search category, any posts that “mentioned” “@GretaThunberg,” and any tweets that included the hashtag “#GretaThunberg.” Similarly, for each of these searches, I set minimum likes to 100 and the categories of “Top,” “Latest,” “Photos,” and “Videos” were assessed to find critical messages. The search settings avoided including content from “Blocked” or “Muted” Twitter accounts and hid “Sensitive” content. I included posts from organizations, like *The Babylon Bee*, a satirical right-wing news source, within the analysis. I classified tweets critical of Thunberg through thematic analysis with the aim of “reveal(ing) how power is convening.” Further, each critique theme employs various “institutionalized rules” that represent a “dialectic of control.” In Chapter Three, where critical tweets are thematically discussed, I “articulate how discourses of power ‘create and sustain social practices which control” (Kearl, 2015, p. 67).

To collect tweet fragments of Thunberg's responses to critics and to explore her Twitter presence broadly for Chapter Four, I conducted advanced searches for each month from January, 2019 to March, 2020. Within these searches, I set the "From these accounts" search setting to "@GretaThunberg," with no specification for minimum likes and with dates set from the beginning of one month to the first day of the next month. I conducted a similar process of searching through the categories of "Top," "Latest," "Photos," and "Videos" for each month.

The hybrid nature of Twitter became especially apparent when Thunberg or critics included photos of Thunberg from U.N. speeches or marches, photographs that had been digitally altered, or media that directly referenced Thunberg or an event she attended. Further, Twitter users can post content from other media outlets or Twitter users who critique Thunberg, not adding their own content to supplement, and instead allowing the linked article or video to speak for itself. In this paper, I have chosen to include content that is critical of Thunberg despite being included in tweets that are supportive of her. Typically, when posts that are supportive of Thunberg include comments condemning her, the supportive tweet is meant to be a critique in its own right of the content critical of Thunberg.

Chapter Three will dive into how tweets critical of Thunberg reaffirm systems of power in the hope of exposing dominance and providing an "emancipatory effect" from these discourses (McKerrow, 1989, p. 91). I'll explore Thunberg's response to critics on Twitter as well as her Twitter presence more broadly in Chapter Four. The goal of Chapter Four is to identify how Thunberg rhetorically bolsters herself and Fridays for Future and facilitates resilient social movement in the face of critique identified in

Chapter Three. In the next two chapters, an expanse of Twitter use will be exemplified: that which “promotes public discourse that is simple, impetuous, and frequently denigrating and dehumanizing” from Thunberg’s critics, and that which utilizes Twitter’s potential to be a site of constructive “affective connections that build communities of practice” in Thunberg’s response (Ott, 2017, p. 60; Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015, p. 934)

Chapter Three: A Barrage of Critique @GretaThunberg

Despite continually-shifting context, the expansion of the Friday's for Future movement, Thunberg's various travels, speeches, and the evolution of her Twitter presence and activism over the course of many months, critics have persistently reiterated or contextually reapplied the themes of critique outlined below. The themes I identify by no means cover the entirety of the broad range of critique that Thunberg's Twitter critics employ, but were some of the most frequent discourses found that invoke identity. Critique based on youth can be found throughout, although dominant discourses of youth feature much more explicitly in some critique than in other critique. This chapter begins with an outline of criticism that centers Thunberg's youth, like critics who cite her lack of qualifications or her "youthful" emotions to undermine her. Then, I'll explore intersectional critique that implicates Thunberg's "negative" killjoy demeanor and behavior, her Asperger's Syndrome, and her girlhood and femininity. Finally, I'll take a look at how critiques of Thunberg's identities have been aggregated to bolster and feed longstanding conservative conspiracies of socialism, and how these conspiracies have been wielded against her.

Attacking Credibility: Undermining Thunberg's Youth

Numerous Twitter posts critical of Thunberg undermine her based on age. These tweets place her within dominant notions of childhood that construct

children as outside the category of people who are able to or who ought to exercise political agency. Further, many of the posts that undermine Thunberg based on age leverage dominant ideologies that assume children are “citizens in the making,” or not-yet citizens (Gordon, 2010, p. 9). The identity of most of Thunberg’s critics, typically white adult males, indicate that, socially and politically, most of those critiquing Thunberg wield privilege and power that Thunberg does not. To reiterate Gordon (2010), constructions of adolescence can “function to maintain adult identity, value systems, and power,” which “results in young people’s actual lived realities of political, economic, and social oppression” (Gordon, 2010, p. 7). Within critiques that undermine Thunberg based on age, youth as inherently unqualified and youthful emotions are the categories of critique presented here.

Do You Have a Resume?: Greta Thunberg as Unqualified

Critics who undermine Thunberg based on her youth often cite lack of experience, qualifications, or education as reason for why she should not be listened to or taken seriously. Some of these critiques place Thunberg within a broad category of “child,” comparing her to other children who likely do not or *cannot possibly* know what they are speaking about on a political topic. On September 18, 2019, the day that Thunberg testified before the United States Congress, Matt Walsh tweeted: “If congress wants someone to testify on Mid East policy, my six year old daughter is available” (Walsh, 2019). Walsh’s post includes a video from *The Hill* of Thunberg’s testimony. The next day, September 19, 2019, *The Babylon Bee* tweeted: “Government That Wants You To Take Climate Change Seriously Invites Foreign High School Kid To Testify Before Congress,” with a link to the satirical news source’s article (The Babylon Bee, 2019a).

Both of these messages point to Thunberg's supposed lack of expertise on the topic she testified about. Walsh implies that his six-year-old daughter, who likely knows little about a topic as complex as foreign policy, would be worthy in the eyes of Congress to testify because they gave Thunberg a platform to speak on the climate crisis. *The Babylon Bee* suggests that the U.S. government doesn't take the climate crisis seriously because it invited Thunberg, who is posed here as a less-than-qualified teenager and as someone who not only shouldn't be testifying on climate policy, but who shouldn't be testifying in a "foreign" country.

Other critics point to a lack of expertise that is "exposed" when Thunberg does not have a script in front of her. Lady Rose, on September 30, 2019, posted a YouTube video of Thunberg titled "Greta Thunberg without a script to read from" (dodgen66, 2019). The descriptor line of the video stated: "Little bit harder to act," implying that without a script, Thunberg's "acting" becomes more apparent. The video shows Thunberg answering a question on September 24, 2019 at a UNICEF panel, where she asked for a question to be repeated, then provided a brief response ("I think the message we would like to send is that we have had enough"). After responding, Thunberg handed the question off to her fellow panelists by saying, "anyone else want to answer that question?" (dodgen66, 2019). Lady Rose included their own text above the video in their Twitter post: "I thought Greta was an expert? An expert should know their topic well enough to answer a few questions....without a script. Hummmm Not impressed" (Rose, 2019). Lady Rose indicates that Thunberg's lack of expertise is more evident when she has to fend for herself without prepared remarks, suggesting that Thunberg doesn't know as much as she would like people to think she does about her own message.

Conservative critics who undermine Thunberg’s lack of qualifications appear poised to highlight a “double standard” in how the mainstream media treats Thunberg. On one hand, Thunberg’s articulate activism, platform, and global movement would suggest that she speaks powerfully on her subject, yet on the other (highlighted in this theme of critique), Thunberg is a child without a degree, she is not a scientist, and she occasionally has trouble answering questions without a script. The perceived incongruity of the power of Thunberg’s advocacy and her identities, which might appear to render her unable to amass such a powerful movement, function to feed conspiracy theories about Thunberg as the puppet of left-wing interests, which I detail in a later section.

Other tweets juxtapose Thunberg with people who are assumed to have expertise, such as scientists. On September 30, 2019, Anton (Tony) Lazzaro posted:

More than 500 scientists just came out and said there is no climate emergency. Yet, the media thinks we should all form climate policy around a 16-year-old girl from Sweden. Retweet this if you believe the 500+ scientists instead of Greta Thunberg! (Lazzaro, 2019).

Maxime Bernier, a Canadian politician, tweeted: “On the same day that Greta Thunberg made an impassioned speech to the UN about her fears of a climate emergency, some 500 scientists sent a registered letter to the UN Secretary-General stating that there is no climate emergency” (Bernier, 2019a). In an ironic move, critics here champion “experts” and “scientists” over Thunberg, whose message is guided by the IPCC and the best available science. Further, these critics disregard a staggering consensus of over 97% of experts who agree that the climate crisis is human-caused (NASA, n.d.).

Some critics imply that Thunberg’s striking during school hours has led to her be less educated, amplifying her lack of qualifications. Thunberg’s and Friday for Future’s

climate strikes rely on youth activists skipping school on Fridays, and Thunberg's activism in North America and around Europe during 2019 led her to take a sabbatical year. Some critics merely implore Thunberg or Fridays for Future strikers to go back to school, while others assert that school strikers are not learning and therefore are not educated about their own advocacy. In the words of mpiotrowski, "Go back to school kid. #2019in5words" (mpiotrowski, 2019). Mpiotrwoiski's tweet was a response to the hashtag #2019in5words and responded to Thunberg's #2019in5words: "Our house is on fire. #2019in5words (Thunberg, 2019b). While mpiotrowski's tweet was directed at Thunberg, others are directed at Fridays for Future strikers broadly. From Adrian Hilton on February 28, 2020, with an attached image of climate strikers huddled together at Thunberg's UK speech at College Green in Bristol: "From the four corners of the UK they come to hear #GretaThunberg. I do hope these kids' geography teachers tell them next week that the UK's CO2 emissions have fallen 38% since 1990...Perhaps Greta might speak in China next week?" (Hilton, 2020). In this post, Hilton points to strikers' supposed ignorance surrounding emissions and Thunberg's misdirected striking in places like Bristol, when China's emissions are high. Hilton cites the students' skipping school as one of the sources of their ignorance, undermining the students and their mode of civil disobedience simultaneously.

Critique has also focused on Thunberg's lack of a college degree in any science or in the field of economics. On January 23, 2020, *The Associated Press* tweeted that "U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin takes a swipe at 17-year-old Swedish climate activist @Greta Thunberg, says she's in no position to give economic advice until she goes to college and comes out with an economics degree" (The Associated Press, 2020). The

message included the *Associated Press* article “Who is she?” - US Treasury chief takes swipe at Thunberg” (Pylas, 2020). The critique that Thunberg doesn’t have a college degree not only reaffirms the gatekeeping that inhibits those without access to a college education from entering formal political platforms, but implicates Thunberg’s age as she has not yet had the opportunity to choose to attend college and is still moving through the high school system in Sweden.

Critiques that attack Thunberg’s lack of qualification render Thunberg’s advocacy obsolete by undermining her ability to speak in a knowledgeable manner on the climate and climate policy. As a child, Thunberg is left out of a category of people who can access “expertise” or “qualifications” by these critics because she isn’t considered old enough to have achieved either. Thinking back to Campbell (2005)’s understanding of rhetors as being “inventors” who are “materially limited,” and “linguistically constrained,” and whose agency can be considered to be an invention, critics who undermine Thunberg based on lack of qualifications emphasize Thunberg’s supposed and assumed material limitations and linguistic constraints to an excess that might lessen her perceived ability or credibility to “invent” or act in the face of the climate crisis (Campbell, 2005, p. 5).

“Youthful” Emotions: Temper Tantrums, Drama Queens, and Delicate Feelings

I’m confused.

Is @GretaThunberg

1. a fearless, brilliant and emotionally mature role model.
2. a [*sic*] emotionally delicate child with autism.

MSM [Main Stream Media] please pick one and stick with it

(Donktum, 2019)

The duality within Carpe Donktum's December 13, 2019 tweet indicates a false binary that those who critique Thunberg based on "youthful emotions" reinscribe or riff on. The post insinuates that Thunberg cannot be a "fearless, brilliant and emotionally mature role model" and an "emotionally delicate child with autism" simultaneously (Donktum, 2019). Tweets that pose Thunberg's passionate speeches and advocacy as the result of insubstantial childhood emotions feature prominently in posts that criticize Thunberg based on age, and each relegates Thunberg's emotions to those of a child who cannot be "emotionally mature." Ashley StClaire addressed Thunberg as "temper tantrum throwing Greta Thunberg" in a September 30, 2019 tweet, and Jeremy Clarkson (an English broadcaster and journalist) commented in an article for *The Sun* that Thunberg was a "spoilt brat." Clarkson went on to tweet on September 29 that it would be nice if Thunberg "learned some manners" (StClair, 2019; Clarkson, 2019). In the same interview with *The Sun*, Clarkson called Thunberg's September 23, 2019 address to the U.N. Climate Action Summit a "meltdown." Bette Midler quoted Piers Morgan as having said that although Thunberg is "articulate," she is also "very young" and "seems very overemotional." Morgan continued to say that Thunberg is "a vulnerable young drama queen" (Midler, 2019). The emotions Thunberg demonstrates thus frame her as lacking credibility due to immaturity, incivility, and/or privileged upbringing ("spoilt" brat).

In a video posted by Terrence K. Williams, a right-wing comedian, Williams suggests that Thunberg's emotional activism is the result of small problems that, due to her youth, she cannot see past or put into perspective. Williams appears standing on his knees with

knees stuck in tennis shoes so as to appear short, with tissue up his nostrils, in a sideways baseball cap, pretending to be “Tyrone Williams,” a 15 year-old boy who is a “climate activist.” “Tyrone,” viewers learn, got kicked out of his mother’s house and sent to his grandmother’s house because he turned the air conditioning on to combat “climate change in the house.” Williams structured his video around Thunberg’s U.N. Speech, beginning with the assertion that he “shouldn’t even be here right now,” that he should be “on the other side of the hood,” in reference to Thunberg’s comment that she “should be back in school on the other side of the ocean” (PBS News Hour, 2019). “Tyrone” continues on to say that, because it’s raining outside, his grandma cannot barbeque. Further, “Tyrone” complains that, because of the wind, his blunt kept getting blown out at school and that’s why he got caught by the administration, resulting in his getting into trouble for smoking on school grounds. Tyrone then cites climate change for making him move to his grandmother’s house, for lack of barbeque, and for his getting in trouble at school. In the text above the video, Williams posted: “Another CLIMATE CHANGE ACTIVIST Greta Thunberg is not the only one! This 15 year old boy is pissed off about Climate Change! We may Need [*sic*] to listen to #LittleTyrone” (Williams, 2019). Here, Williams posits that Thunberg is “pissed off” about “climate change,” which amounts to temperature fluctuations and changes in weather that impact her life in petty, childish ways.

Conjuring images of toddlers kicking and screaming on the floor to get what they want, or images of teenage girls rolling their eyes at their parents, all of these critiques pose Thunberg as an emotional child who lacks perspective. These critical tweets insinuate that Thunberg’s concern over the climate crisis is blown out of proportion, and,

like a temper tantrum, a product of feminine teenage attraction to drama as a “young drama queen,” or a slight inconvenience that Thunberg that has amplified and scapegoated onto weather. In each of these critiques, through framing Thunberg as a petulant and emotional child who is upset over something insignificant, critics not only undermine her: they undermine her cause as something that only a “spoilt brat” would cause a fuss over. Within critiques that name Thunberg’s advocacy as a “tantrum” or as mere “youthful emotions,” critics place Thunberg within a broad category of female “child” who is associated with frivolity, a lack of seriousness, and a lack of self-control that might only appear with age, experience, and “maturity.”

Tweets that critique Thunberg as being overly-emotional not only implicate Thunberg’s childhood, they also implicate the fact that Thunberg is female. Women and girls have historically been excluded from accessing the political sphere or holding positions of power due to notions that they are not “emotionally fit” to do so. Girls, especially, as Taft (2014) indicates, were thought to have been socialized away from engaging in political action, according to early scholarly conversations in the field of political socialization studies. Taft (2014) says that “girls were primarily understood as absent from political life and therefore were largely left out of research on political engagement and citizenship” (p. 261). Notions of the “proper” socialization of girls appears within tweets that fall into the category of critiquing Thunberg based on “youthful emotions.” For instance, Clarkson’s comments that Thunberg should “learn some manners” and that she is a “spoilt brat” indicate that for Clarkson, Thunberg isn’t performing what he would consider to be a “well-behaved” female child who “knows their place.” For many, the still-prevalent saying that “children should be seen, not

heard,” indicates that “good children” who are polite will not speak up, or will act within the bounds of what dominant discourses deem appropriate for the behavior of girls.

Therefore, within critiques that undermine Thunberg based on her “youthful emotions,” she is placed within a category of a “typical” emotional female child and simultaneously excluded from a category of white girlhood that is “good,” “well-behaved,” or that abides by traditional “manners.” Further, because of Thunberg’s removal from “well-behaved” or “well-mannered” girlhood within these critiques, schoolchildren who school strike for the climate globally are undermined as similarly “dramatic,” “spoiled,” or displaying the behavior of a “brat.”

As queer scholars and feminists of color have long pointed out, politics of politeness can function to silence, marginalize, and oppress. Critical communication scholars Rudick and Dick McGeough (2019) have pointed to politeness as a “social regulatory norm” that, according to Terkourafi (2011) “effects social regulation inasmuch as (it) contribute(s) to the reproduction of the social order that gave rise to (politeness) in the first place” (p. 2840). Terkourafi continues to state that politeness allows the “ruling class” to “play a gatekeeping role which is central to the...operation of society as we know it” (Terkourafi, 2011 in Rudick & Dick McGeough, 2019, p. 2840). If every young female activist was to ascribe to dominant notions that “children should be seen not heard” or perform “well-mannered” girlhood, their “capacity to act” would be greatly limited within the confines of dominant rules meant to regulate social norms.

Greta Thunberg Kills Joy

Related to Thunberg’s “youthful emotions” are tweets that frame Thunberg as what Sarah Ahmed might call a “killjoy.” Ahmed’s work calls into question that “certainly to

be a good subject is to be perceived as a happiness-cause, as making others happy” and that “to be bad is thus to be a killjoy” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 20). Without using the word “killjoy,” specifically, critiques of Thunberg’s emotions as perpetually negative or too serious place her within the realm of the “killjoy,” indicating that she is being or is “bad” in some way (Ahmed, 2010, p. 20). While the prior theme diminished Thunberg’s emotion as indicative of her lack of maturity, tweets within this theme seem to conclude that her affect is dangerously overpowering or “unnatural.” Negative stereotypes associated with activist identity amplify this theme of critique as activists have been viewed “unfavorably” and understood as “aggressive, unconventional, and unpleasant people” who are “eccentric and militant” (Bashir et al., 2013, p. 615).

Some critical posts call Thunberg out for being angry or unhappy, and all tweets in this category of critique insinuate that she is a broadly negative person. Donald Trump, for example, sarcastically tweeted in response to Thunberg’s September 23, 2019 United Nations Climate Action Summit Address that Thunberg “seems like a very happy young girl looking forward to a bright and wonderful future. So nice to see!” (Trump, 2019a). Later, on December 12, 2019, after Thunberg had been nominated *TIME Magazine*’s person of the year, Trump tweeted that her selection was “so ridiculous,” and that “Greta must work on her Anger Management problem, then go to a good old fashioned movie with a friend! Chill Greta, Chill!” (Trump, 2019b). Trump’s tweets, ironically, frequently employ angry, rage-filled rhetoric. Posts that paint Thunberg as being someone whose mood is continually negative, or as someone who is ill-tempered overall, use Thunberg’s “negative” emotions similarly to critiques that insinuate she cannot control her youthful

emotions: they imply that Thunberg's advocacy is a product of her unhappy disposition as opposed to being substantive.

Similar to the politics of politeness described previously, the concept of "happiness" has also been a tool to justify marginalization. Ahmed (2010) argues that society creates "happiness scripts" that are gendered and provide "a set of instructions for what women and men must do in order to be happy, whereby happiness is what follows being natural or good" (p. 59). Ahmed goes on to say that part of children's "happiness script," is an "obligation...to be happy" (p. 59). "Happiness scripts" fit within McKerrow's definition of "institutionalized rules" that are practiced by dominant classes to "regulate the rhetorical practices and actions of the oppressed" (Kearl, 2015, p. 67). In the case of "happiness scripts," the performative emotion of happiness is regulated by dominant discourse.

Specifically for young girls, the expectation of being pleasant, happy, of smiling, or of being "nice" in the name of politeness and obligation is a mechanism for reinforcing existing power dynamics that keep children in their "proper" place: a place away from the political realm. Trump's December 11, 2019 tweet that said Thunberg must "work on her Anger Management problem, then go to a good old fashioned movie with her friend," implies that if Thunberg fixed her "negative" and angry emotions and went to a movie (an activity that is well within a stereotypical, hegemonic "happiness script" for children) that a return to "normal" childhood behaviors might lead to happiness - or some degree of "chill." Trump's post implies that a movie theater could be a place where a child of Thunberg's age "ought to" be spending her time. The traditional childhood "happiness script" that Trump's tweet calls to implies that Thunberg might be "happier" or less angry

in an apolitical space, that, within dominant ideologies, might be sanctified as a “natural” or “good” space that is conducive to her wellbeing. Further, Trump’s tweet places blame for Thunberg’s supposed “Anger Management” problem on Thunberg, as she has deviated from a sanctioned childhood “happiness script” by entering politicized spaces (like United Nations conferences, Congress, or British Parliament). Critique of Thunberg and Fridays for Future strikers discussed above that implore youth climate activists to go back to school also implicate “happiness scripts” and politics of politeness in a similar manner to Trump, as they imply that there is a “right” and “healthy” place for children to be: in school, another place assumed to be away from the political realm.

Other tweets critical of Thunberg’s disposition imply that she is grumpy or curmudgeonly. On January 22, 2020 Juanita Broaddrick, in response to Greta Thunberg meeting Al Gore at the United Climate Change Conference (the COP25), called Thunberg “the ever Disgruntled Greta,” while on October 5, 2019, Shefali Vaidya used the hashtag #GretaHumbug (Broaddrick, 2020; Vaidya, 2019). Others, like badassday, referred to Thunberg as “Bad Tempered Swedish Pol Pot Tribute Truant Greta,” connecting her disposition to claims that she is anti-democratic (badassday, 2019). Posts that indicate Thunberg is a “humbug” or is “disgruntled,” use words and emotions that are typically associated with older adults, like underpaid workers on strike or the elderly Ebenezer Scrooge from Charles Dickens’ 1843 novella *A Christmas Carol*, who’s famous line “Bah! Humbug!” has become well-known for representing the misanthropy of a man who famously kills joy during the Christmas Season. Further, calling Thunberg a “humbug” implies that she is somehow deceptive or false in her behavior. These tweets can also be analyzed through a lens of Ahmed’s concept of the “happiness script.” As

Thunberg is being critiqued here as “unhappy,” she has been removed from the realm of “natural or good” child: one who is assumed to be carefree, agreeable, and who frequents sanctioned child-friendly spaces (like movie theaters or school). Critiques of Thunberg’s temper or personality relate to themes that not so subtly undercut her agency on the basis of mental health.

“Deeply Disturbed:” Oppressive Notions of Neurodiversity

In an August 29, 2019 tweet, Avi Yemini posted a video of Thunberg giving a statement following her arrival to New York via zero-carbon emission yacht Malizia II after having crossed the Atlantic Ocean. In the video, Thunberg speaks on how direct action is needed for drastic change to reduce the devastation of the climate crisis.

Thunberg wraps up her comments by saying: “let’s not wait any longer. Let’s do it now” (Milman, 2019). She then stands for a few minutes in silence as the cameras keep rolling; she fidgets a bit and hands the microphone off to someone to her left. Her face twitches slightly every now and again and it appears that she might be visibly uncomfortable, unsure of what to do, or overwhelmed. Yemini’s text that accompanies the video clip referenced a comment made by Andrew Bolt in which Bolt called Thunberg “deeply disturbed” (Bolt, 2019). Yemini’s tweet said that “Andrew Bolt was right, @GretaThunberg is so obviously ‘deeply disturbed,’” and then invites his followers to decide for themselves by including the text “You be the judge” directly above a link to the brief one-minute video clip (Yemini, 2019). Yemini’s message implies that Thunberg’s body language is indicative of someone who is “deeply disturbed.” Critics who point to Thunberg’s Asperger’s to undermine her advocacy typically use harmful misconceptions surrounding neurodiversity to write her off as someone who isn’t

reasonable, can't be rational, or is outside of the realm of "normalcy." Campbell's definition of agency is "to have the competence to speak or write in a way that will be recognized or heeded by others in one's community" (Campbell, 2005, p. 3). Here, as Yemini points to Thunberg's body language as a signal that she is "disturbed," he attempts to render her deviant and her message illegible.

In Sebastian Gorka's September 23, 2019 tweet, mentioned in further detail below, Gorka addressed Thunberg as an "autist child," in reference to her Asperger's syndrome (Gorka, 2019). Undermining Thunberg's message based on her mental "illness" intertwines with notions of the adults around her exploiting her. Michael Knowles, who on September 23, 2019 referred to Thunberg as a "mentally ill Swedish child" on *Fox News*, posted later that day that "Her mother wrote a book about her mental issues. There is nothing shameful about living with mental disorders. What is shameful is exploiting a child - particularly a child with mental disorders - to advance your political agenda" (Knowles, 2019). Here, Knowles implies that Thunberg is easily taken advantage of and is less capable of having her own "political agenda," not only as a child but "particularly" as a child with "mental disorders."

Certain tweets state that Thunberg's message is bad for her mental state, and suggest that the fear involved in Thunberg's message or the negative stereotype of environmental activists being extremist might contribute to her "mental illness" (Stenhouse & Heinrich, 2019, p. 339). On September 30, 2019 Spiked tweeted that "Climate-change alarmism is now making children ill. They march with placards saying 'I'm going to die of global warming.' They suffer from eco-anxiety. Greta Thunberg is in a constant state of panic. Green fearmongering is really bad for kids" (Spiked, 2019a). Here, Spiked follows the

logic of Thunberg as a killjoy, concluding that her state of mind is so harmful and dangerous that it is spreading to others. Anxious children, similarly and perhaps overlapping with unhappy children, youth activists, or both, are posed as less able or less likely to follow the dominant “happiness script” prescribed to children (Ahmed, 2010, p. 59). While the post doesn’t specifically name Thunberg as “mentally ill” in as direct a way as other tweets, it does say that she is in a constant state of “panic” and that ascribing to “climate-change alarmism” puts Thunberg and other children at risk as it interferes with their “happiness.” Spiked also quoted Brendan O’Neill, a right-wing British journalist, in a December 31, 2019 post as having said:

I’m really worried about Greta Thunberg. We now know that she has a history of mental-health related problems and yet greens are pushing her to the forefront of a movement that is depressing, doom-mongering, and apocalyptic. This can’t be good for her (Spiked, 2019b).

O’Neill’s rhetorical move situates Thunberg’s identity as someone with Asperger’s within a long-standing rhetorical hurdle facing climate crisis communication: that the urgent message can be undermined as alarmist. O’Neill posits the “depressing” and “apocalyptic” rhetoric of the climate movement as something that might be “bad” for someone with “mental-health related problems,” causing him to be “really worried” for her.

Some critics go further, asserting that Thunberg should not be practicing advocacy or making speeches, and should instead be at home because of her “mental health problems.” On February 23, 2020 Julia Hartley-Brewer stated that “As I’ve said for a long time @GretaThunberg is a vulnerable child with serious mental health problems who is being exploited by her parents & climate activists. She should be at home not on

the world stage” (Hartley-Brewer, 2020). Hartley-Brewer’s comment dovetails with Twitter discourses presented previously that point to childhood “happiness scripts” or suggest Thunberg should be in school. Hartley-Brewer’s message implies that there is a “proper” place for children with “serious mental health problems,” and that the “proper” place is at home, away from activism and political spaces that are framed as unhealthy for her.

Similar to the concept that Thunberg has been “brainwashed” by adults around her, these critics indicate that Thunberg’s determined advocacy as well as her diagnosis are being caused by or exacerbated by the “apocalyptic” nature of “climate-change alarmism.” Critics here imply that the “doom-mongering” message is the driving force behind Thunberg and her associated movement, as opposed to a climate crisis or to Thunberg willingly speaking passionately on issues which demand change. In this vein of critique, critics simultaneously undermine both Thunberg and her message. They posit that the message of the climate movement is harmful and that the youth whose minds have been warped by the harmful message are, in turn, undermined as warped or somehow tainted by the message. These critics imply that Thunberg’s message is exacerbating her “mental illness” and impacting what she does - rendering her less capable of acting on her own behalf.

Others imply that Thunberg’s mental differences render her message, platform, or advocacy questionable or misguided. Andy Ngo tweeted on April 24, 2019 that, “given Greta’s issues with self-harm to her body, should we be indulging her message of catastrophe & anxiety?” (Ngo, 2019). Ngo’s post included a link to the *Quillette* article “Self-Harm Versus the Greater Good: Greta Thunberg and Child Activism” (Neuding,

2019). Ngo suggests that Thunberg's message might be a product of her own "issues with self-harm" that followers "indulge" when they agree with or support her, as opposed to a realistic response to a crisis worthy of alarm. Thunberg's direct way of speaking has also been attributed to her Asperger's in an undermining way. In a May 13, 2019 tweet, Spiked posted an article by Michael Fitzpatrick with the Twitter caption: "Greta Thunberg has been treated as an autistic prophet, as someone whose 'glorious simplicity' stems from her Asperger's diagnosis. This celebration of autistic traits is deeply worrying, argues Dr. Michael Fitzpatrick" (Fitzpatrick, 2019; Spiked, 2019c). While Ngo and Spiked's tweets might seem different, their overarching message is the same: Thunberg's activism has been influenced by or influences her "mental illness" in a way that renders activism unhealthy for Thunberg or for society.

Further, many critics point to Thunberg's advocacy as hysteria, a phrase that's historically been associated with over-exaggerated female emotions or feminine illness. The term hysteria, in the words of Koerber (2018), is a tool that has been used to "explain female problems since the beginning of recorded history" and derives from the Greek word for "womb," making the verb inextricable from femininity (Koerber, 2018, p. 182). Critics who claim that Thunberg's advocacy is a product of hysteria or is hysterical assume that the problem is a problem with Thunberg or the feminine behavior of those who ascribe to her message. "Female hysteria" was once a formal diagnosis or recognized as a symptom of disease, meant to explain a gamut of "unusual" behavior from anxiety to excess sleeping. Critics on Twitter make use of the hashtag #ClimateChangeHysteria, and sometimes address Thunberg as the cause of spreading hysteria. On September 25, 2019, conservative youth activist CJ Pearson tweeted at Greta

Thunberg: “@GretaThunberg, stop making young people look bad. The same hysteria you spew today is the same hysteria that Al Gore did not too long ago. None of his predictions came true. Neither will yours. You don’t speak for me nor our generation” (Pearson, 2019). Pearson explains that hysteria is unfounded and removed from reality.

Critics here use Thunberg’s diagnosis to undercut her agency and disrupt her perceived “*capacity to act*,” (Campbell, 2005, p. 3). The term “mental illness” comes with societal stereotypes and stigma. Corrigan et al. (2005) assert that “common stereotypes about mental illness include dangerousness, incompetence, and character weakness” (Corrigan et al., 2005, p. 181). These stereotypes are, like most stereotypes, generalizations that prove harmful and overly-broad by lived experience; yet they have tangible impact on those subject to their effects. If critics can wield the “mental illness” stigma of assumed incompetence against Thunberg, or relegate Thunberg or her “hysterical” advocacy to the “mental illness” stigma of being dangerous to herself or society, Thunberg’s access to “competence to speak or write in a way that will be recognized or heeded by others in one’s community” is greatly decreased, impacting Thunberg’s agency (Wanzer, 2011, p. 345).

Rhetorically Weaponized Misogyny

Thunberg has also been subject to critique and rhetorical attack based on her femaleness. Critique that focuses on Thunberg’s identity as a girl features misogynist slurs and sexualization of Thunberg, and sometimes results in tweets that evoke sexual violence. Through misogynistic attacks on Thunberg, critics remind her that her femaleness “define(s) and limit(s) who can participate in the public - to the point that not only are female bodies excluded from ‘the public,’ but so is anything associated with the

‘feminine’ (Foust et al., 2017, p. 9). Adult men have stated that Thunberg needs to be spanked, evoking simultaneous images of fetishized eroticism or a misbehaving child subject to violent discipline. *Breitbart* columnist John Nolte posted in September of 2019 that he was unsure if Thunberg needed “a spanking or a psychological intervention,” (Nolte, 2019). A November 1, 2019 tweet from bad take curator calls out Steven Crowder, a conservative American-Canadian commentator, for posting a poll to determine what Halloween costume would be “best.” The poll included the option of “Slutty Greta Thunberg” among other costumes (bad take curator, 2019). In these tweets, Thunberg is hypersexualized and objectified through a male gaze, which Laura Mulvey argues reinforces the “dominant patriarchal order” through “pleasure in looking” that posits “anything erotic” as a “language of the dominant patriarchal order” (Al-Ghabra, 2015, p. 28). Through sexual objectification and slurs that demerit or slander Thunberg’s reputation, critics who mobilize misogynistic rhetoric to undermine her hail larger discourses that have been historically used to undermine women.

Some misogynistic critical tweets of Thunberg objectify and dominate her through the male gaze’s “language of...dominant patriarchal order” by depicting Thunberg in explicit images of sexual assault (Al-Ghabra, 2015, p. 28). A sticker depicting the rape of Greta Thunberg with the X-Site logo, an oil company from Alberta, Canada, beneath it, spurred deserved backlash on Twitter, with one Twitter user (Michelle Cohen, MD) reposting *Global News*’ write up “Alberta energy company under fire for image appearing to depict Greta Thunberg,” with the caption:

When a woman won’t be silenced by mockery, slander or insults, the next step is often to remind her she can be raped. Threats of sexual violence are a well worn [*sic*]

way to put women in their place by reminding them it's safer to be quiet, fearful and obedient (Barkto, 2020; Cohen, 2020).

Michelle Cohen, MD put it well, as threats of sexual violence are often a tool to oppress and silence women or to remind them that their safety is under constant threat by toxic masculinity. When asked if he knew about the violent sticker circulating X-Site, Doug Sparrow, the company's General Manager, said that he did know, and that Thunberg "is not a child," that she is "17" (Barkto, 2020). Those who employ misogyny against Thunberg often downplay her youth and assert that she is more of an "adult" than a "child" to justify their sexualization of her.

Conspiracy: @GretaThunberg in Cahoots

Above a picture of Thunberg giving her September 23, 2019 United Nations Climate Action Summit speech with photo shopped fine white lines streaming upward that attach to her shoulders, arms, and back, reads the Twitter caption: "Marionette Strings Clearly Visible During Greta Thunberg Testimony" (The Babylon Bee, 2019b). The message is clear: Thunberg's message is not Thunberg's message. It is instead the agenda of people who are controlling her: likely adults. *The Babylon Bee's* tweet is not alone in implicating frequently unnamed and suspicious third-party puppeteers in the production of Thunberg's advocacy (including her Twitter presence). Some of Thunberg's Twitter critics describe her as an inanimate object who can only move with the help or will of others who have perceived greater "capacity to act" (Campbell, 2005, p. 3). Descriptors like "marionette," "Greta the Climate Puppet," and "prop," not only imply that Thunberg is not acting of her own accord, but call to mind the theatre, where narratives are dramatized and typically aren't based in reality (The Babylon Bee, 2019b; Milloy, 2019;

Riprock, 2019). Alluding to a theatrical performance when speaking about Thunberg trivializes her cause as a “dramatization” or something that is being “put on.”

Other posts state that Thunberg is being used as a human shield, a public relations device, or a promotional tool to push the agenda of her parents or adult activists around her. Paul Joseph Watson, in response to Thunberg and other young activists’ filing a legal complaint against five of the globe’s most heavily polluting countries (that did not include China) on September 23, 2019, tweeted:

Greta Thunberg (the people using her as a child human shield for their hysterical propaganda) has filed a complaint with the UN against 5 countries for not stopping climate change. China - the biggest polluter in the world - is not one of them. Greta Thunberg is a fraud (Watson, 2019).

Within this post, Watson indicates that, not only are “people” using Thunberg to spread “their hysterical propaganda,” but they are also using her as a “child human shield.” The notion of Thunberg as a mouthpiece who is being “used” as a shield suggests Thunberg’s childhood (and any immunity from critique that the identity of being a minor carries) is being exploited by manipulative adults to spread their message globally.

Metaphors that position Thunberg as a puppet or shield suggest not only that there are some adults willing to put Thunberg’s body on the line for their own gain, but that the adults’ message wouldn’t hold up without a child mouthpiece. Stephen L. Miller of *Fox News*, in response to a post from Adam Best, stated that “When you hide behind teenage kids like David Hogg and Greta Thunberg and use them for human shields like you are now, what you’re really saying is ‘Hey my political arguments can’t be made by functioning, well-adjusted adults’” (Miller, 2019). In this critique, Miller points to the notion that Thunberg is being used as a human shield, but directs focus onto her message.

Miller states that Thunberg’s message, which won’t hold up when given by “functioning, well-adjusted adults,” relies on her childhood for impact. Here, Miller’s tweet complicates notions of youth political agency. While some critics point to Thunberg’s exclusion from a stance of the youth-deficit model, which assumes children are “citizens-in-the-making,” Miller asserts that the left is manipulating discourses of youth activist exceptionalism that might provide youth a “special status” within formal political spheres to lift an otherwise impotent cause (Gordon & Taft, 2011, p. 1523; Gordon, 2010, p. 8).

Another subset of critique within this category use the argument that Thunberg is being manipulated to direct attention away from Thunberg and her message and toward the questionable ethics of the adults surrounding her. These types of tweets condemn Thunberg’s parents and the adults in her life for exploitation, child abuse, or bad parenting in the name of their own advocacy. Thunberg’s youth and Asperger’s feature prominently in Twitter posts that suggest she is experiencing child abuse or manipulation, typically to indicate that she is more easily exploited or taken advantage of due to these identities. Janice Atkinson posted on August 15, 2019: “Greta goes to a special needs school. She has OCD, an eating disorder, autism and elective mutism. She is being exploited by adults in the climate change industry. Who will pick up the pieces when this child combusts?” (Atkinson, 2019). Atkinson’s message included a retweet of Julia Hartley-Brewer’s August 15, 2019 tweet:

If you genuinely think Greta Thunberg isn’t a vulnerable child being exploited by her parents and every adult around her to further their political aims, you need to read what Greta’s own mother says about her deeply troubled child. It’s heartbreaking (Hartley-Brewer, 2019a).

These two tweets - and those like them - strip Thunberg of her agency by assuming that she is fragile due to her identities, and point to these characteristics to amplify their condemnation of those who are “manipulating” Thunberg.

Typically in combination with allegations of parental exploitation or child abuse, other messages claim that Thunberg believes the ideas she advocates for and is speaking her mind, but that she has been brainwashed by adults around her. Sebastian Gorka, on September 23, 2019, posted that Thunberg’s U.N. Climate Action Summit speech was a “performance” and that “@GretaThunberg is disturbingly redolent of a victim of a Maoist ‘re-education’ camp. The adults who brainwashed this autistic child should be brought up on child abuse charges” (Gorka, 2019). This message poses a different method of adult manipulation. Instead of Thunberg as a marionette or child human shield, Gorka’s post insinuates that she is speaking on her own behalf, but that she has been mentally coerced, programmed, or “brainwashed” in a manner similar to how victims of a “Maoist ‘re-education’ camp” were brainwashed. On April 25, 2019 Julia Hartley-Brewer posted:

Can people please stop attacking *and* deifying Greta Thunberg. She’s a vulnerable 16yr old with Asperger’s who’s terrified her world is about to end. Don’t be cross with her, be bloody furious with the adults who’ve told her those lies and are using her for their political aims (Hartley-Brewer, 2019b).

Hartley-Brewer’s tweet, while it doesn’t use the rhetoric of Thunberg as “brainwashed,” does insinuate that she has been fed lies by those who are close to her for their political agenda. By focusing on the manipulation or exploitation of Thunberg critics avoiding the societal backlash surrounding adult critique or slander of children.

Tweets that state that Thunberg isn't the person who crafted the messages she advocates for, whether because she is being used as a puppet by adults, is being abused for a cause, or has been brainwashed, strip Thunberg of agency. Wanzer (2011) interprets Campbell's understanding of agency as an "authorizing force" that "functions in a manner best described as *a priori* in relation to discourse, including the discursive production of identity" (Wanzer, 2011, p. 345). Critics here assume that, due to her identities, Thunberg's choice or agency cannot exist, and assert that she must be being coerced by those with assumed greater agency. At first glance, it might seem as though critics who undermine Thunberg's childhood and Asperger's diagnosis posit adulthood and mental health as *a priori* "authorizing force(s)" for agency in the face of the climate crisis (Campbell, 2005, p.3). While these critics' tweets do posit this, there is more at play as many adults who don't have disclosed diagnoses have spoken on behalf of the climate movement and have been subject to similar critique. The question for Twitter critics within this category then becomes: who is manipulating Thunberg? The logic of Thunberg as a puppet or shield provides an entry point for a number of conspiracy theories surrounding her advocacy.

Almost all of the critics mentioned above who assert that Thunberg is being manipulated fall to the political right. Many of the critiques that state that Thunberg is being manipulated stop there, but others proceed to identify the manipulators. However, all involve the idea that Thunberg and her advocacy push the agenda of others. Specifically, Thunberg or her "handlers" have been called out for supporting leftist causes or for championing socialism. Critique that calls Thunberg political, in tandem with tweets that render her a "puppet" or a "mouthpiece," position her within

conspiracies of socialism. Beyond the complicated relationships, personal biases and beliefs, social discourses, and general nuance that surrounds each person's perception of any political party, critics who accuse Thunberg of being political imply that her cause is biased and supports an agenda. Branding Thunberg as someone who is behaving on behalf of a political party opens her to a broader range of critique by association, enabling critics to associate her with vilified political figures, biased sources of funding, political views that she may or may not share, and a gamut of conspiracy theories that conflate Thunberg's associations with political figures to nefarious plotting. Such charges may preempt the efficacy of climate advocates by positioning the results of critical thinking, free expression and assembly, and actions toward the public good as the result of immoral control from above.

Specifically, critics who spread right-wing conspiracies point to Thunberg as a socialist "agent" or "pawn," a member of the liberal elite, or as someone who has been victim to leftist indoctrination from a tainted and biased education system. In doing so, critics place Thunberg up against a formidable and well-established rhetorical foe, which has been described in American politics by Jamieson and Cappella (2010) as the "conservative echo chamber." Within this echo chamber, a template of attack marginalizes leftist political figures by "expanding the extremes of the discourse, ridiculing the Democratic contender, impugning (their) character, and attaching strong negative emotion to the audience experience of (them)" (p. 19). Further, this echo chamber reifies conservative ideals in the discounting of liberals (Jamieson & Capella, 2010, p. 19). This conservative echo chamber also reinforces itself as right-wing news

sources promote insular news consumption and discount “mainstream media” as biased in favor of the left, amplifying the political importance of sites like Twitter.

While *Fox News*, a conservative news source, might avoid one of its pundits asserting that Greta Thunberg is being abused by socialists who have forced her into advocating for their cause, commentator Tomi Lahren has insinuated that Thunberg might be something other than an activist by twice tweeting that Thunberg is an “activist” in quotation marks, and by asserting that Thunberg’s activism is “BS.” Lahren, on December 30, 2019, posted that:

“Activist” @GretaThunberg says she wouldn’t waste her time talking to Trump. If you’re so serious about your mission to save the planet, why wouldn’t you attempt to speak to the most powerful man on earth? I know, because this whole tantrum is BS (Lahren, 2019).

While Lahren didn’t dive into much detail, her post is out there for conservative Twitter users to become co-creators of, enabling extrapolation and conspiracy surrounding what she might mean by Thunberg being an “activist.” If Thunberg isn’t an “activist,” who might she be? If her message is “BS,” why does she have such a foothold on the global stage? These questions, while they might seem open to interpretation, navigate discourses and pre-existing conspiracy theories surrounding socialism and leftist political figures.

One conspiracy that aims to “reveal” the “reality” of Thunberg’s powerful platform is that she is being controlled by or is financially backed by wealthy liberal elites. Thunberg has been photographed alongside politicians she’s met with who support the cause of the climate movement, such as Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, former United States Vice President and environmental activist Al Gore, President Barack Obama, and U.S. House Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who advocated for the adoption of

the climate-friendly Green New Deal, among others. Many of these politicians have a large Twitter presence and are wealthy, and all of them support liberal ideals and are well-educated. Thunberg's meetings with these well-known climate advocates fuel the fire for critics who assert that Thunberg is acting on behalf of the wealthy, "elite" left and, in some cases, who spread doctored photographs that extend conspiracy.

Critics have associated Thunberg with leftists whom she hasn't met with and has no connection to. She has been associated with people like Jussie Smollett, a liberal celebrity actor who staged a falsified hate crime, and George Soros, a left-wing billionaire financier who right-wing critics have demonized and called "globalist." On September 24, 2019, C.O.D. stated that Thunberg is "the AOC [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez] of Jussie Smolletts," and an "obvious political pawn of the Democratic Party." The message concluded that "@GretaThunberg is the worst actress ever. #MAGA" (C.O.D., 2019). While Thunberg's association with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez stems from their shared interest in saving the planet and a few meetings they've had, Thunberg has never met with Jussie Smollett. Smollett's falsification of a hate crime placed him among wealthy, phony liberals, who do, indeed, stage events for political gain. By associating Thunberg with Smollett, C.O.D.'s post implies that Thunberg is similarly deceptive. Further, C.O.D.'s comment is strikingly similar to critique youth activist David Hogg and other Never Again youth activists faced that referred to the students as "crisis actors" hired by the left to advance the cause of implementing gun regulations to prevent violence (Chavez, 2018).

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (or AOC, as she's referred to), who C.O.D.'s tweet mentions as well, has also been accused of being a liberal pawn and someone who has

been ideologically indoctrinated into championing socialist ideals. AOC promoted the Green New Deal, a plan to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions that has received backlash for being “elitist” and “radical.” Thunberg’s association with AOC implies that she is radical, and has been “indoctrinated” into elitist socialist beliefs.

In a variation on the theme of critique that Thunberg is being manipulated by adults, critics identify the manipulators as powerful leftist politicians who have large Twitter followings. In some tweets, Thunberg’s “handlers” or sources of funding are performing the manipulation. A widely re-posted message that includes three pictures of Greta Thunberg with Luisa Neubauer, a German Fridays for Future activist, is captioned:

For anyone who thinks Greta takes care of it all: Her supervisor Luisa Neubauer works for the organization one.org. This organization is funded by, among others, Bill and Melinda Gates, Bono of U2, Open Society of George Soros. So the elite are behind this (sandieshoes, 2019).

Neubauer and Thunberg are friends, and Neubauer has stated in an interview with the *Associated Press* that Thunberg is an inspiration of hers, but the assertion that Neubauer is a “supervisor” of Thunberg has been debunked (Lajka, 2019; Robinson & Sardarizadeh, 2019) . While George Soros has donated money to the ONE Campaign, which spreads awareness about global poverty, and Neubauer has volunteered there, Neubauer and Soros’ association ends there. By associating both Neubauer and Thunberg with wealthy left-wing “elites” like Bill and Melinda Gates, Bono, and George Soros, critics provide tenuous “evidence” in support of a larger conservative conspiracy that Thunberg is a socialist puppet, and that her advocacy is a plot by the wealthy, globalist left.

Accusations of Thunberg's ties to Soros don't stop with Neubauer, as AFP Fact Check tweeted on September 25, 2019 that an image of Thunberg with Al Gore had been doctored to remove Gore's face and add in George Soros' face, making it seem as if Thunberg was meeting or "buddying up" with Soros (AFP Fact Check, 2019). The doctored picture circulated around Twitter as further "proof" of conspiracy. Critics who assert that Thunberg's advocacy and Fridays for Future marches have been funded by billionaire puppet masters on the left strip Thunberg of agency and relegate her to a tool that is being used for nefarious, grand, and secret political ends.

A final conspiracy surfaced frequently in my fragment collection that connects the anti-Thunberg conservative echo chamber to a long-standing argument concerning public education as indoctrination. Lucio Cesar replied to Greta Thunberg's December 11, 2019 tweet of her COP25 speech in Madrid with a cartoon of Thunberg in a pink shirt, staring straight ahead with eyes drawn to be slightly off-kilter and surrounded by dark circles. She stands with a sign that reads "YOUTH FOR CLIMATE ACTION," as an arm labeled "EDUCATION SYSTEM" pours liquid from a bottle marked with a skull and cross-bones, a red hammer and sickle (a symbol of communism), and the word "SOCIALISM" into a funnel stemming from Thunberg's head (Cesar, 2019). Cesar's tweeted photo indicates that what has "brainwashed" Thunberg is the left-leaning education system that force-feeds children socialist ideologies. According to critics here, the adults who are "manipulating" Thunberg have and have had influence over education systems for the purpose of influencing children with leftist politics, the green movement, and socialism from a young age. According to a July 5, 2019 post by Tony Heller: "We failed decades ago when we allowed communists to take over the public school system -

and now we have a generation of indoctrinated children like @GretaThunberg and @AOC” (Heller, 2019). Heller’s post includes a picture of children from the 1984 film “Children of the Corn,” with red laser eyes. Both Heller and Cesar point to the political left for “indoctrinating” or “brainwashing” Greta Thunberg.

On December 18, 2010, Maxime Bernier, a Canadian politician and outspoken critic of Thunberg, tweeted that “Schools are terrorizing our kids with Greta Thunberg’s apocalyptic nonsense. Kids go to school to LEARN, not be ideologically indoctrinated with the far left’s latest fads. If you’re a parent, please call your school and protest” (Bernier, 2019b). Bernier’s tweet included *National Post*’s article: “We’re going to die’: Toronto mother says young daughter terrified by school presentation on climate change” (Donnelly, 2019). Bernier warns parents that their children, too, are at risk from leftist “indoctrination” as the Canadian school system teaches about the “fad” of the climate crisis. This message exemplifies an aggregation of the critiques that I’ve presented in this chapter. Bernier poses Thunberg as an extremist killjoy who is not only a product of an education system that “ideologically indoctrinates,” but who is aiding a socialist agenda in spreading the “fad” of advocating for the climate. This “fad,” as implied by Bernier’s tweet, is insubstantial, apocalyptic, and threatens the happiness, “stability,” and apolitical nature of “our kids” (children other than Thunberg). Bernier’s tweet is exemplary of “the ways in which adolescence, as a social and historical construction, functions to maintain adult identity, value systems, and power, and results in young people’s actual lived realities of political, economic, and social oppression” (Gordon, 2010, p. 7). It plays on the idea that Thunberg deviates from accepted “social and historical construction(s)” of adolescence, and that this is not “natural” as she veers from

the “happiness scripts” of gendered childhood. Bernier posits that Thunberg’s deviance spreads and impacts children who were once “happy” and in their proper place before her influence got to them.

The implications of Bernier’s tweet go beyond his message and the discourses at play. As power and identity are inextricable, Bernier’s identity, as well as that of other critics, must be taken into account when identifying mechanisms of power behind critique represented throughout Chapter Three. While Thunberg draws criticism from those of numerous identities, my Twitter fragment collection indicates that the majority of her critics appear, from their Twitter profiles (or from knowledge of who the Twitter user is), to be white adult males. Twitter users, news sources, and commentators have also noticed this trend in identity make-up of Thunberg critics (Nelson & Vertigan, 2019). Thunberg’s critics also tend to fall to the political right on a global scale, a commonality that becomes especially clear when critics call Thunberg a product of socialism or a leftist mouthpiece. The climate crisis is heavily politicized, and climate crisis denial has become an ideology that is associated with, and might be one of the many defining characteristics of right-leaning political parties. Beyond critical tweet content, I noted critics here to be politically right-leaning based on the composition of their profiles, their Twitter handles (for example: Tony Lazzaro, @GOPTony), the politicians they mention and support in posts surrounding Thunberg, the news sources they retweet or comment on, and the messages on the clothing they wear in posted photos.

While the identity of critics isn’t the main focus of this thesis, noting trends aids in understanding power dynamics that stem from the bodies and societal positionality of critics, and is imperative to more fully understanding the discourses within critique

presented above. Identity trends among critics, as well as the dominant discourses that they employ to undermine Thunberg's identity, not only have implications for critics' own identities, as will be discussed in Chapter Five, they have impact on Thunberg's navigation of critique and the strategies of response her Twitter presence exemplifies, which will be explored next in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four: #FridaysforFuture: Thunberg as Networked Node

“While outrage campaigns intended to work the refs and appeal to fears of appearing partisan may work with lawmakers or companies in Silicon Valley, the youth climate movement appears wholly unmoved,” (Warzel, 2019).

The previous chapter detailed how Twitter critics have attempted to undermine Thunberg and Fridays for Future by targeting identity to impact agency. In Chapter Four, I turn to focus on how Thunberg’s Twitter presence inoculates her and Fridays for Future against critique. In this critique of freedom, I aim to show how Thunberg expands her own and others’ “*freedom to pursue other power relations*” beyond the dominant critiques outlined in Chapter Three, and to open these strategies and my analysis of them up to the “permanent criticism” inherent to critique of freedom (McKerrow 1991, p. 75; McKerrow, 1989, p. 96).

I consider Thunberg’s rhetorical work in helping constitute and strengthen a collective identity network for Fridays for Future. Through close reading of her tweets, themes emerge around centering science as an underwriting agency and framing youth climate activists and their broader allies as in political antagonism with critics (including those in Chapter Three). I then consider how Thunberg’s rhetoric is responsive to attempts to disarm her on the basis of her identities: specifically, I feature ways that Thunberg’s Twitter presence begins to foster intersectionality and poses positive views of her own marginalized identities. I then look into more direct ways that Thunberg engages

criticism, highlighting how affordances of Twitter (especially the ability to retweet and use ironic profile language) play into Thunberg's responses. As Campbell (2005) explains, "agency" is a term that "can refer to invention, strategies, authorship, institutional power, identity, subjectivity, practices, and subject positions among others" (p. 1). The strategies I found Thunberg's Twitter presence to exemplify here are intrinsically agentic. With each strategy of response and each action on Twitter, regardless of content, Thunberg reminds critics, her Twitter followers, and others of her agency and of the agency of Fridays for Future.

Science as Agency: Bolstering Climate Activism

One of Thunberg's most frequent responses to critics is to center the agency of science to bolster her message. Thunberg points critics to the anthropogenic nature of global warming and the increasingly urgent implications that stem from inaction: rising sea levels, increased ocean acidification, more destructive and devastating storms, ecosystem collapse as feedback loops reinforce warming, and so on. In a Facebook post Thunberg tweeted a link to on February 2, 2019, she stated:

...if everyone listened to the scientists and the facts that I constantly refer to - then no one would have to listen to me or any of the other hundreds of thousands of school children on strike for the climate across the world (Thunberg, 2019c).

Thunberg, with this sentiment, renders her identities - specifically her youth, but also her female-ness, her Asperger's, her Swedish background, her whiteness, and so on - less relevant (or irrelevant) when it comes to her message and that of Fridays for Future.

In a January 1, 2020 interview, American singer Meat Loaf stated that he felt bad for Thunberg because she's been "brainwashed" (Aviles, 2019). Thunberg, on January 6, 2020, reminded her Twitter following that "It's not about Meatloaf. It's not about me. It's

not about what some people call me. It's not about left or right. It's all about scientific facts. And that we're not aware of the situation. Unless we start to focus everything on this, our targets will soon be out of reach." She included a link to Carbon Brief's video about the 1.5°C climate goal quickly slipping out of reach (Thunberg, 2020c). In this comment, Thunberg deflects attention away from herself and her identities, from negative comments or name-calling, and from Meat Loaf. She then redirects focus onto data that legitimates her cause for concern.

Thunberg has also used the scientific content of her message to deflect criticism that she is political or socialist. On December 21, 2019, she posted:

I'm sometimes called 'political.' But I've never supported any political party, politician, or ideology. I communicate the science and the risks of failing to act on it. And the fact that the politics needed don't exist today, neither to the right, left nor center. If anyone thinks that what I and the science are saying is advocating for a political view - then that says more about that person than about me (Thunberg, 2019a).

In this statement, Thunberg deflects criticism of a hidden political agenda by pointing to the "objective," and apolitical nature of scientific fact, and to powerful, credible, and well-respected organizations.

When Thunberg appeals to the objectivity and authority of science, of experts, and of institutions, she shifts the burden of defending subjectivity and credibility from her body to that of scientists and expert agencies, which themselves "typically seek to conform to identity norms, like objectivity, when approaching their task" (Kunseler & Tuinstra, 2016, p. 1). Organizations like the IPCC, which produced the 2018 IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C [SR 1.5] that Thunberg submitted as the body of her testimony before the United States Congress on September 18, 2019, work to maintain

their “autonomy, openness and disinterest” in politics apart from “policy-relevant knowledge” in order to retain authority on matters like the climate crisis (Kunseler & Tuinstra, 2016, p. 2). By centering science, Thunberg can rhetorically tap into prior work scientists have done to promote and maintain “identity norms” that accompany science, like “autonomy” and “objectivity.” Further, Thunberg undermines critique aimed at her own identities by pointing to the fact that almost all of the scientists who collaborate with or who work for the IPCC are expert adults, a demographic who are less likely to be subjected to critique on the basis of lack of qualifications or youthful emotions.

Alongside retweets from climate scientists, reputable sources that take the climate crisis seriously, and scientific organizations like the IPCC, Thunberg has also cited experts who support Fridays for Future. In an April 11, 2019 post, Thunberg quoted a *Science Magazine* article in her caption: “We declare: Their concerns are justified and supported by the best available science. The current measures for protecting the climate and biosphere are deeply inadequate.’ World leading climate scientists support #FridaysForFuture #schoolstrike4climate” (Thunberg, 2019d). The posting included a link to the article, titled “Concerns of young protesters are justified.” Thunberg has also retweeted experts who have participated in Fridays for Future marches, like German professor, oceanographer, and climatologist Stefan Rahmstorf. Rahmstorf posted a picture of himself holding a “Scientists for Future” poster and captioned his message: “Over 25,000 scientists from Austria, Germany and Switzerland have now signed a statement supporting #FridaysForFuture!!...” (Rahmstorf, 2019). Thunberg captioned her retweet: “Over 25000 scientists from Germany, Switzerland and Austria support #SchoolsStrike4Climate and #FridaysForFuture” (Thunberg, 2019e). In instances like

these, Thunberg provides evidence that scientists support Fridays for Future. In this way Thunberg not only supports the movement by appealing to the agency of science, she also bolsters it by making clear that the school strikes are supported by knowledgeable adults who understand and are in favor of Fridays for Future's cause and method.

Campbell argues that agency is “constrained by externals, by the community that confers identities related to gender, race, class and the like on its members and...determines not only what is considered to be ‘true,’ but also who can speak and with what force,” (Campbell, 2005, p. 3). When Thunberg evokes science and scientists as the “inventor(s)” of her message and posits herself and other youth activists as messengers (who are nevertheless materially impacted in varying ways by the climate crisis), the personal constraints that the “community...confers” to her “identities” are replaced with external “constraints” that the “community” might confer onto large swaths of scientific experts. Having removed constraints that the community may have placed on Thunberg's identities, she is more able to act within now-expanded confines of the (no less complicated) societal discourses and external constraints surrounding trust in science, scientific institutions, and expertise. Further, Thunberg's rhetorical centering of science can be a strategy that Fridays for Future youth activists might employ more broadly, as this redirect undermines attacks based on identity. Thunberg's Twitter presence speaks towards a more intersectional approach to movement-building and climate activism, as it renders Thunberg's identity less important to Fridays for Future's message.

In this way, Thunberg's Twitter presence calls to the “communal” and “participatory” nature of agency in creating a Fridays for Future collective that resists identity

essentialism and speaks toward a more intersectional approach. Campbell (2005) addresses essentialism as an agentic pitfall that “treat(s) diverse individuals as if they were identical based on socially constructed categories” (p. 4). Instead, Campbell points to the relationship of collectives to “externals” in what Sartre refers to as “serial relationships” in which “individuals...have no set of attributes in common except their shared relationship to an external object” (Campbell, 2005, p. 4). Due to the increased number of bodies and identities constituting Fridays for Future, essentialist definitions of Fridays for Future would be reductive, involve an erasure of identity, and harm agency. Instead, the “culturally available subject-positions” that each Fridays for Future activist navigates remain even as Thunberg continually points to the message that unites Fridays for Future activists: the “external” causes of the climate crisis and championing the science behind the crisis.

However, posing Fridays for Future and youth climate activism broadly as a movement merely in relation to an “external” is also harmful essentialism, and similarly risks erasure of the materiality of identity. While an appeal primarily to what seem like “externals” might open space for Fridays for Future engagement from a broad range of youth activists, it is also harmfully reductive. Wanzer’s expansion of Shome (2003), described in Chapter Two and recapped here, provides intervention: “instead of treating identities as though they occur on the head of a pin, we have to recognize that identities occur not just anywhere, but *somewhere*” and that “social agency is derived not just anywhere but *somewhere*.” Wanzer (2011) goes further: “more importantly than ‘somewhere,’ perhaps, is a consideration of *some way*” (p. 349). The rhetorical move of pointing to “externals” to downplay the impact of Thunberg’s identities does function to

increase agency for some Fridays for Future activists to an extent, but is also a move that other youth activists might not be able to or want to employ, as access to it relies on privilege and place-based context. For example, white youth activists who can have the privilege of being more easily able to render identity less relevant might be more able to access this rhetorical move. While the rhetorical redirect from Thunberg's identity onto a broader message of championing science and scientific institutions could enable more intersectional engagement and inclusive movement building, the materiality of marginalization, context, and of identities like race, nationality, sexuality, gender, socio-economic status etc., creates nuance given varying lived realities. Thunberg's rhetorical redirect might not only be inaccessible, but perhaps harmful to the agency of marginalized people while potentially expansive to the agency of the privileged. Further, to posit science as "external" to identity removes it from its deeply embodied nature which is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Five.

Greta Thunberg's Twitter Page as Fridays for Future Network "Node"

"There are countless school strikers and young climate activists around the world.

Not just me. They all have names and stories waiting to be told."

(Thunberg, 2020d)

"Our stories have been told over and over again...There is no need to listen to us anymore," Thunberg stated of herself and of German climate activist Luisa Neubauer during a meeting at the COP25 Climate Summit in Madrid, Spain, in December of 2019 (Jordans & Parra, 2019). Both Thunberg and Neubauer have received disproportionately large amounts of attention and notoriety from news media and political leaders in comparison to similarly-committed and inspirational youth climate activists who aren't

white, who are indigenous, and who live in the global South, among others. One example of this erasure is the *Associated Press*'s cropping of Vanessa Nakate, a Ugandan youth climate activist, out of a photo containing Thunberg, Neubauer, and two other white youth climate activists. In the words of Nakate, the *Associated Press* didn't just erase a photo, they "erased a continent" (Okereke & Busari, 2020; Nakate, 2020a). During the meeting at the COP25 Climate Summit, Neubauer and Thunberg, aware of this disproportionate attention, handed off their mics to fellow youth activists from the United States, the Philippines, Russia, Uganda, China, and the Marshall Islands. Thunberg stated: "It is people especially from the global south, especially from indigenous communities, who need to tell their stories," (Jordans & Parra, 2019).

Thunberg has amassed a large following due to her passion for her advocacy, her bold, direct, and emotionally-stirring speeches, and also due to her whiteness. To combat the media's visible biases, Thunberg has wielded her Twitter following and notoriety to, in many instances, de-center herself in favor of elevating a plethora of other voices, and has asked others to do the same. In a January 8, 2020 tweet, Thunberg retweeted Vanessa Nakate's Twitter post. The photo, of Nakate and others protesting, stated:

I am Vanessa from Africa. I have striked for climate [*sic*] for over a year now with fellow #Africanactivists. I have realised that our cries have not been listened to. It is important to know that #Africanlivesmatter. The #RiseUpMovement is changing that story this year! (Nakate, 2020b).

Thunberg's retweet stated:

Africa is so hugely underreported when it comes to the climate crisis (as well as everything else...). If you have a platform - help amplify the voices and stories from Africa. Africa has a key role in the fight for climate justice. Please acknowledge and share their perspective (Thunberg, 2020e).

Retweeting is a Twitter affordance that can spread agency, as the words of the original Twitter user, Nakate, in this case, remain intact. By sharing the stories of others, Thunberg's Twitter presence creates group identification by inviting collective identity surrounding "shared interactions" within "social institutions, organizational structures, patterns of social interaction and a constellation of experiences," that are built on lived experience, but that don't privilege any individual's voice or discount difference (Kearl, 2015 p. 67).

Within Fridays for Future on Twitter, Thunberg has constructed herself as a "node" within a broad network, as opposed to a figurehead. Within network theory of social movements, Foust and Drazner Hoyt (2018) point to how the architecture of a movement's network functions similarly to a nervous system that "conjoins and sutures people across fragmented political topography in nodes and pathways, in which nodes function as an aggregation of information" (p. 44). Thunberg's Twitter presence facilitates the spread of agency that not only lifts up and includes a broad range of youth activists, but that prevents Fridays for Future's network from becoming reliant on any one individual, account, or location.

When I first visited Greta Thunberg's Twitter page in search of her response to critique, I was struck by the number of posts from fellow school strike activists that Thunberg retweets in a given week. Each day, with an increase of retweets on Friday, Thunberg posts pictures, videos, and comments from Fridays for Future movements globally on her Twitter page. On Friday, March 6, 2020, for example, Thunberg retweeted Friday climate strikes in Kenya, Brazil, Los Angeles and Pasadena, California, Pakistan, Frankfurt, Germany, Mumbai, India, Kobe, Japan, Fort William, Scotland, New

Delhi, India, Maynooth, Ireland, Moscow, Russia, Jerez, Spain, Lübek, Germany, Hamburg, Germany, Varanasi, India, Istanbul, Turkey, Ullapool, Scotland, Uganda, and from the climate strike that Thunberg attended herself in Brussels, Belgium.³

Thunberg frequently avoids adding text to retweets from marches around the world, with the exception of occasionally identifying the location of the strike from where the retweeted photo or video came and adding hashtags, like #FridaysforFuture and #ClimateStrike. For example, Thunberg’s retweet of Licypriya Kangujam’s March 6, 2020 post included Kangujam’s words:

Thanks everyone who joined today’s #ClimateStrike in Mumbai today. It was remarkable. Our voice deserves to be heard by the World by fighting all odds. WE ARE UNSTOPPABLE. ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE. CHANGE IS POSSIBLE. Jai Hind! #ClimateEmergency #ClimateActionNow (Kangujam, 2020).

Thunberg briefly added: “In Mumbai today! #FridaysForFuture #ClimateStrike #schoolstrike4climate” (Thunberg, 2020f). By not adding too much of her own text to retweets from other youth activists, Thunberg avoids speaking for or over them, even as she actively conveys the information through her node in the Fridays for Future network. When Thunberg adds hashtags to posts, she enables others’ messages to expand independently of her node through networks of hashtags, like #FridaysforFuture. Thunberg amplifies retweets from other young activists without redirecting attention onto herself or co-opting other’s words, and instead enables users to “expand the formation of

³ Twitter handles Thunberg retweeted on March 6, 2020: Kenya (@Fridays4futureK), Brazil (@echarpedoclima), Los Angeles, California (@ClimateHuman), Pasadena, California (@edgarmcgregor), Pakistan (@Fridays4FutureP), Frankfurt, Germany (@FFF_Frankfurt), Mumbai, India (@LicypriyaK), Kobe, Japan (@FFFKobe), Fort William, Scotland (@HollyWildChild), New Delhi, India (@parivartanhang), Maynooth, Ireland (@gold_lgold), Moscow, Russia (@MakichyanA), Jerez, Spain (@esclavasjerez), Lübek, Germany (@OLubek), Hamburg, Germany (@endelstamburg), Varanasi, India (@Care4air), Istanbul, Turkey (@ocakyagmur1), Ullapool, Scotland (@FinlayPringle), Uganda (@NamugerwaLeah)

collective identity in the process...in ways that exceed the instrumental control of individual activists” (Foust & Drazner Hoyt, 2018, p. 42). In this way, Thunberg ensures that her node of Fridays for Future on Twitter is co-constructed and can be a jumping-off point for the action of others.

The long list of fellow climate strikers worldwide that Thunberg retweeted on March 6, 2020 provides a glimpse into how she uses her platform to highlight and connect youth climate activists, whose Twitter platforms also function as “nodes” in the Fridays for Future network. Thunberg retweets from Friday for Future accounts that represent countries or regions of the world, like Fridays for Future Pakistan, as well as postings from individual activists’ Twitter profiles. Some who Thunberg retweets are prominent within their own Fridays for Future movements or have made names for themselves as youth climate activists in their own right. For example, Holly Gillibrand, Leah Namugerwa, Vanessa Nakate, and Licypriya Kangujam, among many others, have amassed their own notoriety and large Twitter followings.⁴ Thunberg also retweets lesser-known youth climate activists who may be beginning to strike, continuing to avoid hierarchical formation within Fridays for Future. For example, on March 27, 2020, Thunberg retweeted a video and post by Francis Ssembatya, who stated “Inspired by @GretaThunberg and @matovu_bob, I’ve today joined @Fridays4FutureU and my digital climate strike starts now. #DigitalStrike #ClimateStrikeOnline #fridaysforfuture @Fridays4future” (Ssembatya, 2020). Thunberg’s retweeting of youth activists who are

⁴ Twitter handles of youth activists mentioned above: Holly Gillibrand (@HollyWildChild), Leah Namugerwa (@NamugerwaLeah), Vanessa Nakate (@Vanessa_vash), and Licypriya Kangujam (@LicypriyaK)

new to climate striking helps avoid a small group of influential voices overwhelming the networks that connect Fridays for Future and which might impede newer strikers' perceived agency.

Thunberg also retweets media from climate strikes of various sizes, avoiding representation of only the biggest marches. On February 28, 2020, Thunberg retweeted Anna Kernahan's post that included a picture of herself striking alone, with the caption: "Week 26. 6.5 months. Still alone. Got absolutely soaked today. #ClimateStrike #ClimateActNow #ClimateCrisis #FridaysForFuture #ClimateEmergency #climateresiliency #ClimateJustice #schoolstrikeforclimate" (Kernahan, 2020). On the same day, Thunberg posted pictures from a climate strike that she attended in Bristol with over 30,000 participants. Thunberg included four pictures of the masses gathered with the caption: "School strike week 80. At least 30'000 people in the pouring rain today in Bristol! #fridaysforfuture #schoolstrike4climate #climatestrike" (Thunberg, 2020g). These two posts take up a similar amount of space on Thunberg's Twitter profile and line up among Thunberg's retweets of protests and marches of all sizes, visually implying similar importance regardless of how many people were present at the strikes. These retweets serve to remind the Fridays for Future network that even the smallest groups are in solidarity with larger groups globally.

In a post on January 18, 2019, Thunberg tweeted:

Up to 70 000 school strikers around the world this week. Some are surrounded by thousands. And some sit alone. Like @AlexandriaV2005, @zaynecowie, and @havenruthis and Charlotte here in Tallahassee. #ClimateStrike #FridaysForFuture #SchoolStrike4Climate (Thunberg, 2019f).

Thunberg's message includes a picture of solo striker Charlotte from Tallahassee.

Thunberg's acknowledgement and spreading of strikes of all sizes could function to increase perceived ability to act by reaffirming that striking alone can make a big impact, as does striking among thousands. A sociological approach to agency might consider that "agency to engage in change" has the potential to be amplified by "a collective or a belief that individuals are not acting on their own" as "efficacy" can come from "numbers and perceived esteem of the group" (Pason et al., 2017, p. 9). Thunberg's Twitter presence makes visible the hardy collective that Fridays for Future represents on a global scale, without downplaying the importance of individual protestors.

Thunberg, whose solo climate strike began Fridays for Future and who represents a sizable node in the Fridays for Future network, denies that the global marches and weekly protests constitute "her" movement and instead points to the movement's broadly-shared nature. In a retweet of Hilda Nakabuye's powerful speech at the C40 World Mayors Summit 2019, Thunberg stated: "Please listen to the words of @NakabuyeHildaF, a founder of Fridays for Future in Uganda," (Thunberg, 2019g). Thunberg's phrasing here gives credit where credit is due and recognizes that Fridays for Future in Uganda, while connected to the larger Fridays for Future, has its own story and its own founders: Hilda Nakabuye, among others.

Furthermore, Thunberg rhetorically constructs accolades she receives as belonging to Fridays for Future and climate activists collectively. In a post following Thunberg's selection as *TIME Magazine's* Person of the Year, she tweeted: "Wow, this is unbelievable! I share this great honour with everyone in the #FridaysForFuture movement and climate activists everywhere. #climatestrike" (Thunberg, 2019h).

Thunberg included a link to the *TIME Magazine* article which features her. By sharing ownership of the movement, Thunberg extends agency by increasing the “communal and participatory” structure of Fridays for Future and by allowing space for different individuals and groups to co-create collective identity while celebrating communal achievements collectively (Campbell, 2005, p. 3).

The robust yet diversified and decentralized collective Fridays for Future identity Thunberg’s Twitter presence facilitates has implications for agency, which according to Campbell (2005), is “affected through form” (p. 4). The “form” of a broadly-inclusive and flexible collective identity network not only bolsters Fridays for Future against critique that targets one individual’s identity, but enables climate activists to broadly “resist the subject-positions available to them at given moments in a particular culture” (Campbell, 2005, p. 4). Co-constitutive collective identity of a networked movement also indirectly undermines the power of critique directed at a single node (even a prominent node, like Greta Thunberg).

“We’re Winning:” Collective Identity in Antagonism

“...I honestly don’t understand why adults would choose to spend their time mocking and threatening teenagers and children for promoting science, when they could do something good instead. I guess they must simply feel so threatened by us...”

(Thunberg, 2019i)

Thunberg’s Twitter responses to critique feature a reframing of critical content that poses backlash as a sign that the activism is having an impact and that the movement is “winning.” Through the reframe, Thunberg marks the movement as successful and, in so doing, constitutes collective identity. On December 4, 2019 Thunberg tweeted:

The endless conspiracy theories and denial of facts. The lies, hate and bullying of children who communicate and act on the science. All because some adults - terrified of change - so desperately don't want to talk about the #ClimateCrisis This [*sic*] is hope in disguise. We're winning (Thunberg, 2019j).

In this post, Thunberg claims that adults who do not want to talk about the climate crisis are not only willfully ignorant of or ill-informed about prominent science, but have resorted to “lies, hate” and the “bullying” of children. Although these reframes are “responses,” Thunberg typically speaks not directly to critics, but instead to her followers on Twitter. Thunberg points to the adults’ bullying as a material marker of progress she invites Fridays for Future activists to understand as a “win.” Reframing critique enables Thunberg and her Twitter followers to become energized about the success of their “winning” cause without getting bogged down or discouraged.

In fact, Thunberg has reframed even the most violent attacks on aspects of her identity. In response to the sticker of Thunberg being sexually assaulted that was circulated by workers at X-Site, Thunberg retweeted feminist next door’s post, which included a *Huffington Post* article about the graphic sticker, and the text:

Someone DREW A CARTOON of Greta Thunberg, a teenager, being violently raped. Naturally, some oilfield company men decided to PRINT IT ON A PROMO STICKER WITH THEIR LOGO. Men love to laughingly remind us that if we speak out, we deserve what’s coming to us (feminist next door, 2020).

Thunberg’s added caption stated that “They are starting to get more and more desperate... This shows that we’re winning” (Thunberg, 2020h). Thunberg’s framing of The X-Site sticker’s depiction of her rape indicates that, as critics are having to resort to more drastic or “desperate” measures to halt her advocacy, Fridays for Future must be having an impact large enough to elicit such desperation. When Thunberg directly addresses her “haters,” she typically doesn’t include lengthy commentary, or any words

at all, on critique content in a move that resists providing a platform to deplorable content. Thunberg does, in the case of X-Site, include the biting words of one of her supporters, giving a chance for that person's response to be circulated, and enabling a follower to co-constitute meaning.

When Thunberg reframes critique and includes phrases like “we’re winning,” she creates collective identity through use of the words “we” and “us” that “promote solidarity” while also “deepen(ing) antagonism” between Fridays for Future and critics of Thunberg (Alfonso & Foust, 2019, p. 99). Here, Thunberg frames Fridays for Future as progressing while her critics are represented as “threatened,” “terrified,” or “desperate,” and implied to be “losing.” The “them” Thunberg alludes to, including “haters” and “bullies” the movement is up against, are powerful adult critics. While Thunberg does name the opposition as “desperate” adults, she also creates collective identity surrounding inexcusable behaviors that “they” do and stylistically demonstrates the contrast in behaviors that she does, and that, by extension, “we,” or Fridays for Future, is invited to do. Thunberg places bullying, mocking, threatening, and spreading of hate “when they could do something good instead” in the category of what critics do, while inviting members of Fridays for Future to “promote science,” champion their own marginalized identities, and, much like Thunberg demonstrates in her responses to critics, acknowledge hateful critique as a signal of progress (Thunberg, 2019i).

Thunberg's Twitter page, including the collective identity she creates with statements like “we’re winning,” becomes an archive that Fridays for Future activists can turn to in order to relive powerful moments that redefine critique as progress. Thunberg's page as Twitter archive functions as a “friend-enemy machine” that “fuels collectives through

data aggregation and user-friendly control over symbolic production,” (Foust & Drazner Hoyt, 2018, p. 41). The archive “allows...allies, adherents, opponents, critics, spectators, and descendants to take up aspects of the movement, revisit its significance, and hold it up as an example of the modes of political engagement necessary in the current movement,” (Foust & Drazner Hoyt, 2018, p. 41). When Thunberg retweets a video of a march from Fridays for Future Uganda, that video becomes a part of a Fridays for Future Thunberg Twitter archive that anyone can access, use as a point of reference, reflect on as monument to an achievement, and use as an access point for other nodes or pathways within the Fridays for Future network. Thunberg’s Twitter allows for Fridays for Future strikes globally to “materialize...identity beyond initial performances” (Alfonzo & Foust, 2019, p. 110). When Thunberg reframes critique to represent moments of progress, followers can “hold it up as an example” of engagement and response.

#Aspiepower: Thunberg Champions her own Identities

“...I have Aspergers [*sic*] and that means that I’m sometimes a bit different from the norm. And - given the right circumstances - being different is a superpower.

#aspiepower...” (Thunberg, 2019k)

In response to critics, Thunberg frequently champions her own marginalized identities, framing them as traits that amplify her agency as a climate activist. As we saw in the previous chapter, critics have attacked Thunberg’s youth, her emotions, her mental health, and her lack of expertise, among other identities she holds. When Thunberg uses Twitter to champion her identity, she contradicts dominant constraints that her critics have attempted to “confer” to her to elucidate that her identities might enable her to “speak” with greater “force” than she might have otherwise been able to (Campbell,

2005, p. 3). Here, too, Thunberg provides a template for Fridays for Future activists and her Twitter followers that consists of a “stance” and potential action “to be adopted and adapted by the embodied individuals who come to see themselves through ‘a movement’s’ symbolic action” (Foust & Weathers, 2020).

Thunberg’s rhetoric surrounding her Asperger’s Syndrome is one of the most prominent examples of her championing her own marginalized identities. She has called her diagnosis a superpower and a “gift,” and has frequently used the hashtag #Aspiepower to remind Twitter followers that she, and those who are on the autism spectrum, are powerful (Thunberg, 2019k). While Thunberg admits that her diagnosis helps her in certain contexts and limits her in others, she asserts that her Asperger’s may have helped her begin her climate strike and continue to remain focused on her cause. Thunberg’s August 31, 2019 post, started above, continues to say that “my diagnosis has limited me before. Before I started school striking I had no energy, no friends and I didn’t speak to anyone. I just sat at home, with an eating disorder” but that “all of that is gone now, since I have found a meaning,” (Thunberg, 2019k). Thunberg speaks candidly on Twitter about the limitations surrounding her diagnosis, and has stated that she is transparent about her Asperger’s to de-stigmatize it and to help educate the “many ignorant people” who see it as an “illness” or as “something negative,” (Thunberg, 2019l). To combat dominant portrayals of neurodiversity as “illness,” Thunberg has stated that her Asperger’s can be an advantage that has led to creative and committed activism, as it enables her to “think differently” and “outside of our current system” (CBS This Morning, 2019).

Thunberg has also championed her identity as a female, and has woven gender equality and feminism into her activity on Twitter. On March 8, 2020, International Women's Day, Thunberg posted:

Today is #InternationalWomensDay and we recognise that women are still far from equal to men in today's societies. We can not [*sic*] have climate justice without gender equality. And remember; what we women want today - and every day - is equality, not congratulations or celebrations (Thunberg, 2020i).

On International Women's Day on March 8, 2019, Thunberg tweeted:

Today is #WomensDay. Today we honour sisterhood. Nowhere in the world today women and men are equal The [*sic*] more I read about the climate crisis the more I realise how crucial feminism is. We can't live in a sustainable world unless all genders and people are treated equally #8march (Thunberg, 2019m).

She also reposted an article entitled "Christiana Figueres: Fearless Women Will Lead On Climate Action," with the caption reflecting the title: "Fearless women will lead on climate action.' #InternationalWomansDay" (Thunberg, 2019n). In these messages, Thunberg places gender equality and the fearlessness of women at the center of the climate catastrophe. Centering identity and championing marginalized identities serves to partially counterbalance Thunberg's rhetorical redirect of identity-based critique onto the agency of science, even if it doesn't negate the strategy's potentially limiting impact.

Some of Thunberg's Twitter behavior demonstrates what Sarah Ahmed would call rhetoric of a "feminist killjoy," mentioned in the previous chapter. Thunberg's direct tone, her honesty, and the "remorseless force" with which she speaks upends dominant notions of what a "girl" is assumed by dominant notions to be: well-mannered, pleasant, quiet and apolitical, among other attributes (Birrell, 2019). Thunberg has said that her Asperger's syndrome allows her to care less about following "social codes," which might help her to disregard dominant notions of childhood and feminine "happiness scripts"

(CBS This Morning, 2019). Thunberg's posts on International Women's Day, a day that is considered by some a celebration of womanhood and women, reminds her Twitter followers of the remaining inequalities women face. In doing so, Thunberg "bring(s) others down not only by talking about unhappy topics such as sexism but by exposing how happiness is sustained by erasing the very signs of not getting along," and in this way "disturbs the very fantasy that happiness can be found in certain places," or in this case, on certain days (Ahmed, 2010, p. 66). Disturbing happiness might at first seem to be a negative thing, but, when happiness is used as a device to keep people "in their place," then "to kill joy... is to open a life, to make room for a life, to make room for possibility, for chance" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 20). Reminding her Twitter following of inequality, Thunberg champions women and girls by refusing to ignore realities that shouldn't be forgotten even on days of celebration where "happiness" might be expected.

Thunberg also implicitly champions girlhood when she addresses her own small stature, apparent physical weakness, and emotional nature as attributes that make her powerful (even if her power does not fall within dominant notions of what a "powerful person" might look like or how they might behave). On March 28, 2020, Thunberg was on the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine and gave an interview that she attached in her tweet. Her caption is an excerpt from part of the interview she gave. She states that "I'm very tiny and I am very emotional, and that's something people don't usually associate with strength" (Thunberg, 2020j). Within the interview, Thunberg expands on strength that can be found in weakness: "I think weakness, in a way, can be also needed because we don't have to be the loudest, we don't have to take up the most amount of space, and we don't have to earn the most money" (Rodrick, 2020). Using coded language,

Thunberg alludes to girlhood, youth, and femininity when she speaks about her own “weakness,” small stature, and emotional nature. By championing weakness as powerful in a way that being traditionally strong might not be, Thunberg rhetorically allocates worth and agency to those who might be considered “weak.”

These moments of articulation championing Thunberg’s identities on Twitter create collective identity for Fridays for Future that posits difference as powerful, supports neurodiversity, feminism and girlhood, and defines strength and power in ways that do not align with dominant conceptions. When Thunberg champions her marginalized identities, targeted by critics as “obstacles” to agency, and reframes them as “opportunities,” she embodies the “actuality... of resistance to ideological pressures” and provides one example of resistance for Fridays for Future (Campbell, 2005, p. 4). In this way, she leaves “traces of (her)self” that then function as “artifacts of political engagement” (Alfonzo & Foust, 2019, p. 91). Thunberg’s Twitter followers can then refer to the timeline her page provides as a pedagogy of engagement with identity and difference for Fridays for Future. While Thunberg appears to respond to critics in indirect ways by championing marginalized identities, her more direct responses to those who have derided youth activists (including herself) as overly emotional, inexperienced, or mentally unhealthy, are also archived on Twitter...

Ironically Calling Out Critics

Twitter is widely-known as a site where humor and irony are prevalent, and Thunberg’s Twitter presence frequently employs humorous methods of pointing to hypocrisy of critics and the ironic nature of their critique. Irony as a rhetorical tool on

Twitter has been studied through scholarship on the rhetorical power of memes to build collective identity while encouraging individual interpretations of other users to “join in the play of juxtaposing incongruous elements” that irony invites (Foust & Weathers, 2020). In this way, humor and irony on Twitter enable agency through “communal and participatory” shared meaning-making that “disavow(s) a proffered judgement” (Campbell, 2005, p. 3; Glasser & Ettema, 1993, 324 cited in Olson & Olson, 2004, p. 29). Further, in this communal “disavowing,” collective identity is formed in antagonism.

Under Thunberg’s caption “Hang in there! Help is available,” is a retweet of Mark Humphries September 26, 2019 post of a video captioned: “THE GRETA THUNBERG HELPLINE: For adults angry at a child.” The video begins with a “middle-aged man” opening up about an “embarrassing problem:” that he gets “irrationally angry at a Swedish girl who wants to save the planet” (Thunberg, 2019o; Humphries, 2019). Lucky for the man, the video points to a number he can call for assistance: The Greta Thunberg Helpline. The helpline, according to the narrator, is here to “tolerate” him and listen “no matter how ridiculous [he] sounds.” The video gives a few examples of adults who have called in, with one man expressing his anger at Thunberg’s spreading of “needless anxiety” and her “making the end of the world sound like the end of the world.” Another man asserts that “we shouldn’t be listening to a child, we should be listening to an expert,” and promptly hangs up the phone after the Greta Thunberg Helpline offers to “patch him through” to an expert. The helpline understands that “children acting like adults can make adults act like children” and closes with the ironic statement that the helpline is needed because “when it comes to climate change, we all know [Thunberg’s] the real problem.”

The Greta Thunberg Helpline video, Thunberg's reposting of it, and her doubling-down on or continuing the joke indicate that the "problem" critics have isn't with Thunberg: it's a personal problem that there are resources out there to alleviate. The video pokes fun at various sets of critics. Those who critique Thunberg's hysteria or apocalyptic message are posed as people who don't understand that Thunberg is being reasonable by "making the end of the world" sound like exactly what it is. Critics who go after Thunberg's lack of expertise are framed as people who won't listen to experts when given the opportunity to. The video also riffs on assumptions about childhood and adulthood, indicating that Thunberg, a child, is behaving more like an adult than her adult critics, who are acting like children. While riffing on childhood and adulthood might function to reaffirm dominant understandings of child-like behavior and adult-like behavior, it could also complicate these by ascribing what would be assumed to be "adult-like" characteristics to a child and what would be assumed to be "child-like" characteristics to adults.

While there are many theories and discourses surrounding humor and its rhetorical impact, purpose, or mechanism, Kuts-Flamenbaum (2015) emphasizes the ability of humor to point to apparent incongruities. Kuts-Flamenbaum states that the "experience of putting two incongruous thoughts together creates opportunity for new possibilities to emerge and for predictable expectations to be challenged" and that this makes humor a "valuable persuasive tool that cuts to" a "core objective of social movement action" (Kuts-Flamenbaum, 2015, p. 296). The video, by pointing out incongruities in critiques of Thunberg, not only undermines those critiques by pointing to their ironic nature, but makes clear that their critiques are hypocritical to the point of being laughable.

Thunberg's deployment of humor on Twitter in response to critics doesn't end with the Greta Thunberg Helpline. On July 24, 2019, she posted a cartoon with three boxes. The topmost frame involves a representative of the IPCC holding an orange folder in an attempt to alert politicians to "Global warming." The politicians, represented collectively as an older white man in a suit, respond "LA LA LA I'm not listening," with ears plugged. In the second frame, 15,000 scientists attempt to alert politicians to "Global warming" with the same orange folder, to which the politicians respond in the same manner as before: "LA LA LA, I'm not listening." The third panel involves Greta Thunberg attempting to alert politicians with the orange folder, to which the politicians say, "It's just a kid! We want to receive specialists." Thunberg included the caption: "This sums up just about everything... Comic by @DIBUDessinateur" (Thunberg, 2019p).

The cartoon, similar to the Greta Thunberg Helpline video, makes politicians who critique Thunberg seem hypocritical when they state that "We want to receive specialists" after willfully ignoring experts who have tried to convey the same message. The cartoon also reveals the irrationality of dismissing the information Thunberg champions (the same information that the IPCC and 15,000 scientists present) because of her identity as a "child." By retweeting a comic made by another Twitter user who is supportive of Thunberg, here again she elevates the voice of another, dispersing agency.

In another ironic post on February 15, 2019, in response to British Prime Minister Theresa May's criticizing students who skip school to strike for the climate, Thunberg tweeted: "British PM says that the children on school strike are 'wasting lesson time.' That may well be the case. But then again, political leaders have wasted 30 yrs of

inaction. And that is slightly worse” (Thunberg, 2019q). When Thunberg says that “30 yrs of inaction” is “slightly worse” than “wasting lesson time,” she is being ironic: what’s worse, 30 years of inaction or skipping school for the climate?

In a similar vein of pointing to hypocrisy, Thunberg reclaimed the words of Andrew Bolt, a columnist for the *Herald Sun* and reporter for *Sky News*, in a tweet that “hijacks” Bolt’s words and applies them in an ironic manner (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015, 932). In Thunberg’s August 1, 2019 post, she includes a picture of a posting from the *Herald Sun* that states: “As the deeply disturbed Greta Thunberg spreads her climate panic, we should ask why so many world leaders are listening to her, writes Andrew Bolt.” Thunberg’s tweet states: “I am indeed ‘deeply disturbed’ about the fact that these hate and conspiracy campaigns are allowed to go on and on just because we children communicate and act on science. Where are the adults?” (Bolt, 2019; Thunberg, 2019r). While Bolt’s comment was a jab at Thunberg’s mental health, Thunberg indicates that Bolt was correct, she is “deeply disturbed,” but not for the reasons he indicates. Instead, she pinpoints the cause as Bolt’s deeply disturbing behavior, specifically his “hate and conspiracy campaign” that has been allowed to continue. Thunberg then ironically asks where the adults are, implying that Bolt (an adult), and those who conduct hate and conspiracy campaigns against children are themselves being childish and require supervision.

Thunberg again turned the tables on critics on October 31, 2019 by dressing up as herself on Halloween. She posted a black and white photo where she is sitting next to her climate strike sign, sporting a playful mock-glare and black long sleeved shirt. Her caption read: “So today is Halloween. I don’t celebrate it back home, but I thought I

might give it a try. And apparently when it comes to scaring a bunch of angry climate crisis deniers - I don't even have to dress up!! #trickortreat" (Thunberg, 2019s). This playful move on Twitter lightly mocked climate crisis deniers and critics who have called her disturbed, "chilling," or angry. Thunberg makes clear that she doesn't take herself, or her "scared" critics, too seriously.

Thunberg's use of humor and irony on her Twitter page render her critics laughable, hypocritical, and garishly incorrect. Use of humor and irony often elucidate incongruities within critique that reveal critics to be guilty of what negative attribute or behavior they ascribe to Thunberg. When she exposes critics who center dominant overgeneralizations surrounding her identities to be hypocritical, she deconstructs "dialectics of control" by expanding the range of identities that given critique applies to. This move undercuts limiting assumptions' association with certain identities. When Thunberg asserts that her adult critics are behaving childishly, she also implies that children aren't inherently "childish," as she is behaving more maturely than adult critics. Thunberg's use of humor functions as an archived indicator that she isn't taking critique so seriously as to avoid poking fun, and signals to her Twitter following and Fridays for Future activists that she is resilient and her agency has not been impeded.

Thunberg wields the Twitter affordance of brief bio on her user profile in humorous ways that playfully agitate critics and undermine the individualistic tendency of "taking yourself too seriously." While Thunberg typically allows critics to remain anonymous, amassed in a group she addresses as "haters" or "bullies," she also directly addresses specific critique, generally from powerful, political, male world leaders. When Thunberg does directly address a critic on Twitter, she sometimes reclaims or "hijacks" their words

for her own purposes, using their condescending or undermining quotes as her Twitter bio.

On December 8, 2019, Thunberg reposted a video of an indigenous Brazilian climate activist after he had been shot by a passing car. Thunberg included the message: “Indigenous people are literally being murdered for trying to protect the forrest [*sic*] from illegal deforestation. Over and over again. It is shameful that the world remains silent about this” (Thunberg, 2019t). In a statement on December 10, 2019, Brazilian Prime Minister Jair Bolsonaro addressed Thunberg’s tweet and denounced her as a “Pirralha,” or a brat, who he was surprised the media was giving attention to. Thunberg responded by briefly changing her Twitter bio to read “Pirralha,” reflecting Prime Minister Bolsonaro’s critical name-calling in a rhetorical move she employs more than once over the course of the months studied (Woodward, 2019).

Beyond Bolsonaro, other powerful, male politicians who have critiqued Thunberg have had their words playfully reflected. A few days after Thunberg’s bio read “Pirralha,” she changed it to reflect critique from Donald Trump, who tweeted after Thunberg had been chosen as *TIME Magazine*’s Person of the Year for 2019. Trump’s comment, which was mentioned earlier, reads: “So ridiculous. Greta must work on her Anger Management problem, then go to a good old fashioned movie with a friend! Chill Greta, Chill!” (Trump, 2019b). Later that day, Thunberg’s bio read: “A teenager working on her anger management problem. Currently chilling and watching a good old fashioned movie with a friend,” (Taylor, 2019). This instance wasn’t the first time Trump’s words had been humorously reclaimed on Thunberg’s bio. Months earlier, on September 23, 2019, Donald Trump retweeted a video of Thunberg’s United Nations speech with the

caption “She seems like a very happy young girl looking forward to a bright and wonderful future. So nice to see!” (Trump, 2019a). The next day, Thunberg changed her Twitter bio to read “A very happy young girl looking forward to a bright and wonderful future” (Taylor, 2019). Thunberg has also changed her bio to reflect the words of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who on October 2, 2019, said that he did not share “common excitement” about Thunberg, but that she is likely a “kind and very sincere girl,” to which she changed her bio to read: “A kind but poorly informed teenager” (Haddad, 2019).

By adopting the critical posts and comments of powerful, political men onto her Twitter bio, a space that she typically uses to convey a brief expression of who she is, Thunberg again exposes the ridiculous nature of the critiques against her, and performs what Jackson and Foucault Welles (2015) would call a form of “culture jamming” or “hijacking” (p. 932). Jackson & Foucault Welles’ (2015) study details the Twitter hijacking of the hashtag #myNYPD, which was originally intended by the New York Police Department as a promotional tool. Activist’s hijacking of #myNYPD became a powerful method of exposing the reality of the NYPD’s brutality against minorities that rhetorically “disrupt(ed) dominant narratives of policing” through biting irony (p. 936). Thunberg’s hijacking of politician’s words, while fundamentally different given context, similarly “reframe(s) and retell(s) dominantly birthed stories” (Jackson & Foucault Welles, p. 936). In this case, the politicians’ dominant narratives of her identity are retold on Thunberg’s terms. Thunberg’s “hijack” of Trump, Putin, and Bolsonaro’s words reclaims them for followers’ humorous purposes and calls attention to the incongruity of their critique. When Twitter users look at Thunberg’s Twitter content, the juxtaposition

of the inaccuracy of the reclaimed words on her bio and the serious advocacy and hard work displayed in her feed below adds to the irony of the hijacked content. In adopting the words of critics onto her Twitter bio, Thunberg reaffirms her own identity and purpose in the contrast, while also demonstrating Twitter savvy.

While Trump, Putin, and Bolsonaro were likely made aware of Thunberg's use of their words on her Twitter bio, the move itself seems to have been intended primarily for the entertainment of her followers. In the cases of Bolsonaro and Putin's critical comments, Thunberg brought the politician's words, which were spoken in offline, political spaces, to Twitter, a space where "mass amateurization" is built into the platform's design and where humor runs rampant (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015, p. 935). Jackson & Foucault Welles state that hijacking can "illustrate the democratizing potential of Twitter and the evolving strategies of citizen activists in the age of new media" (p. 933).

In the case of Trump, Thunberg's Twitter bio shift involves "beating him at his own game" so to speak, as Trump relies heavily on Twitter as a political tool. The replacement of Thunberg's Twitter bio with the words of her critics serves to poke fun at them, take them off of their political pedestal by "democratizing" them, and to make them into a joke for her followers. Thunberg's "hijacking" reminds her supporters and critics that she doesn't take any critique, even that of powerful male politicians, seriously and that she has the upper hand when it comes to clever social media use. This strategy, like many of the others demonstrated in this chapter, serves as a pedagogy for Fridays for Future activists to take up, use in the future as personal strategies, build solidarity in joking

around, and foster light poking-fun as a signature move of Fridays for Future climate activists.

Agency and Collective Identity in Thunberg's Twitter

As mentioned above, Campbell (2005), quotes Paul Smith as stating that “the human agent...[is] the place [at] which resistance to the ideological is produced or played out” and that the term “agent,” marks, “by virtue of the contradictions and disturbances in and among subject-positions, the possibility (indeed, the actuality) of resistance to ideological pressures” (p. 4). Campbell goes on to say that, “put differently, these culturally available subject-positions are, simultaneously, obstacles and opportunities, but they are shifting, not fixed, identities” (Campbell, 2005, p. 4). When Thunberg champions her marginalized identities, targeted by critics as “obstacles” to agency, and reframes them as “opportunities,” she embodies the “actuality... of resistance to ideological pressures” and provides an example of this for the Friday for Future movement and for her followers (Campbell, 2005, p. 4). When Thunberg shares her platform and fosters expansion of the large Twitter network of Fridays for Future, she facilitates other youth activist “agents” to become or expand as “sites of resistance” themselves. Thunberg also uses her Twitter presence to demonstrate or make known the multiplicity of sites of resistance for Fridays for Future globally.

The “externals” of science and relationship to the climate crisis point to shared experience that nonetheless varies based on identity, as climate injustice runs rampant and as various parts of the world feel the effects of global warming more dramatically than others. “Form,” like science, can have agency, as well: an agency that “is textual” (Campbell, 2005, p. 7). Textual agency, according to Campbell, “is linked to audiences

and begins with the signals that guide the process of ‘uptake’ for readers or listeners enabling them to categorize, to understand how a symbolic act is to be framed” (Campbell, 2005, p. 7). In the case of Thunberg and Fridays for Future’s message, scientific texts, specifically the IPCC reports, carry their own “textual agency” that relies on discourses of “objectivity,” “reason,” and “fact.” While these associations might elevate the agency of science or undermine it depending on audience, this textual agency nevertheless “has a power to separate a text from its nominal author and from its originary moment of performance,” enabling the text to become a “resource for invention” (Campbell, 2005, p. 7). The scientific “texts” Thunberg points to in her advocacy have their own agentic nature, enabling science and scientific institutions to “act” and be acted upon by “inventors,” like Thunberg or other Fridays for Future youth activists.

Wanzer (2011)’s discussion of Certeau sheds light on how Thunberg’s appeal to the agency of science might represent a rhetorical “strategy:” “Certeau aligns strategies with structures, institutions, mechanisms and subjects that locate their agency in a known locus of power relations that authorizes particular practices and delegitimizes others” (p. 351). While Thunberg does locate some degree of agency in a known “locus of power,” when she points to the agency of scientific institutions, her Twitter is also reminiscent of Certeau’s rhetorical “tactic.” A tactic “must play on and with a terrain imposed on it,” be “organized by the law of a foreign power,” and can be considered to be a “calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus.” Tactics intervene and “transform” circumstances “into a favorable situation” that “take(s) advantage of weakness, fissures, inattention, and so on, to gain an advantage and transform a static place into a constituted

space” (Wanzer, 2011, p. 351). Thunberg’s Twitter presence employs both Certeau’s concept of “strategy” in appealing to a “known locus of power” in science, and “tactics” that enable her and youth activists to maneuver within spaces or “terrain” that has been “imposed on” them by the “foreign power” of adults and politicians. The “strategy” of redirecting critics back to science, as mentioned above, is nevertheless a mark of privilege and isn’t accessible to all bodies. Thunberg’s Twitter makes clear that employing “strategies” and “tactics,” as Certeau defines them, aren’t mutually exclusive, and that sometimes embracing both simultaneously shows promise for agency.

When Thunberg employs the “tactics” of humor, irony, and “hijacking,” of her critics words, these responses represent what Campbell (2005) would call “*techné*,” or the “study, training, and experience that enable(s) one to recognize what means are available in a given situation” and “makes it possible to do what is propitious at the opportune moment” (p. 6). Campbell states that agency is “linked to and effected through artistry or artfulness” and “is learned,” both of which constitute *techné*. When Thunberg uses Twitter in an artful manner in navigating the platform strategically, playfully, and with understanding of the potential of its affordances, she is able to affect her agency in response to critics. Through use of Twitter, Thunberg’s “artfulness” is archived, spreading the possibility for her *techné* to be “taken up” by others.

Due to dominant conceptions that keep youth out of the politics that nevertheless affect them, and concepts that youth are “citizens in the making,” Thunberg’s Twitter presence functions to expand agency also due to the broadly unintelligible nature of youth activism to a system built upon assumptions of adults as solely politically agentic (Gordon, 2010, p. 9). For Butler (1997), agency is the enactment of “a purpose

unintended by power...that operates in relation of contingency and reversal to the power that makes it possible, to which it nevertheless belongs” (Butler, 1997, in Wanzer, 2011, p. 351).

As seen in Chapter Three, Thunberg’s call for the world to “unite behind the science” has been subject to categories of attack and conspiracy that have been long-standing within the conservative echo chamber and which other young climate activists should be ready to face. Despite these critiques, as seen in this chapter, Thunberg has bolstered Fridays for Future and has facilitated the spread of agency among a plethora of “sites of resistance:” the bodies (and Twitter profiles) of youth climate activists globally. Alongside Thunberg’s indirect responses to critics, her direct responses (including rhetorical redirect of critics back to the agency of science, employment of both “strategies” and “tactics” to combat critique, and wielding artful *techné* in humorous Twitter usage that points to hypocrisy of critics) provide a useful case-study in undermining the power of identity-based critique that other youth climate activists might return to, expand upon, or adopt.

Chapter Five: Implications beyond @GretaThunberg

This thesis began with questions surrounding how critics have responded to Thunberg as an influential representative of youth climate activism, how she has responded to critics, and what might be learned about movement-building and youth climate activism from Thunberg's Twitter presence. Each chapter has involved an exploration, be that of current events, scholarship, or Twitter content in order to engage these questions and how they might impact youth activist agency or reaffirm systems of dominance.

Chapter One gave context into IPCC data that demonstrates the urgency of the climate crisis, provided a summary of events in Thunberg's journey from solo climate striker to influential global figure and Fridays for Future catalyst, and discussed Thunberg's bold and direct message to people in power. Chapter One also laid groundwork for understanding the discipline of environmental and climate crisis communication, and addressed some of the major challenges that communicators have faced, like Pezzullo's (2015) concept of "latent exigence." Finally, Chapter One explained notions within scholarship on youth activism with particular focus on societal discourses of youth and girlhood that impact the way youth activists are perceived or act, introducing the importance of this thesis' discussion of agency.

Chapter Two began with scholarship on Twitter as networked media and as space of "mass amateurization" that serves as a fruitful platform for social movement. The

chapter also described some of the key affordances that Twitter provides. As Thunberg's Twitter presence and Fridays for Future represent a small fraction of youth activism mobilized on Twitter, Chapter Two also explored other movements' use of Twitter, as well as how Twitter and networked social media might provide a particularly fertile ground from which youth activists organize. Chapter Two detailed the interpretive stance this thesis embraces, including a description of rhetorical criticism and McKerrow's "critical turn" to more greatly embodied practice that critical rhetoric embraces. Chapter Two introduced the intertwined concepts of agency, identity, and movement in greater depth and as concepts that guide this rhetorical criticism. The chapter concluded with an explanation of data collection methodology.

In Chapter Three, I examined how critics of Thunberg on Twitter have undermined her agency in their critique and how Thunberg's Twitter presence, in her responses and the way that she centers or de-centers her identity conditionally, has facilitated and raises questions for her own and other's agency. Chapter Three employed McKerrow's critique of domination to reveal hegemonic "institutionalized rules," practiced by the dominant classes to "regulate the rhetorical practices and actions of the oppressed" (Kearl, 2015, p. 67). While critiques often implicate multiple aspects of Thunberg's identity at a time, some critics have focused specifically on Thunberg's youth, calling her a "drama queen," a "brat," or a "pirralha," in order to undermine her based on stereotypes of unfounded, petty "childhood emotions." Critics have pointed to Thunberg's lack of qualifications to speak on her cause, have condemned her as an overly-negative killjoy, have called her misogynist slurs, and have circulated violent images of her rape. Further, critics have

undermined her by calling her “disturbed,” or have pointed to her Asperger’s as proof that Thunberg cannot possibly be acting of her own accord. Twitter users have also framed Thunberg as a socialist puppet, a political mouthpiece, and as a child “brainwashed” by a leftist education system. Critique that have connected Thunberg’s prominence to right-wing conspiracy theories or posed her activism as the product of sneaky leftist ideology have, in effect, bolstered the conservative echo chamber. All of these attempts to undermine Thunberg’s “capacity to act” rely upon oppressive stances toward an identity or intersecting identities that Thunberg holds. Critics’ focus on Thunberg’s identity and employment of rhetoric of conservative echo chamber conspiracies point to the still heavily-politicized nature of climate crisis communication.

Thunberg’s Twitter presence, illuminated in Chapter Four, enables Thunberg and Fridays for Future activists to be resilient in the face of identity-based critique through strategic moves that bolster and spread agency within an expansive network. Thunberg’s continual redirect of identity-based critique back to her message of championing the “current, best available science,” evokes the agency of science and the well-reputed scientific institutions that collaborate to articulate the science behind the climate crisis. Through an intersectional approach to activism, Thunberg has also been able to give a platform to a plethora of other youth activists whose voices haven’t been lifted up by the news media in the same way that Thunberg’s has, and who come from many corners of the world. In doing so, the voices and agency of other youth climate activists have not only been amplified and included by Thunberg, but she affirms Fridays for Future’s lack of hierarchical structure through sharing her platform. Thunberg has championed her own

identities and has pointed to the dominant misconceptions with which critics target her. She has reframed her own identities to more realistically represent her lived experience: for instance, that her Asperger's is a "superpower" and not an "illness." Thunberg has also responded more directly to critics by pointing to the hypocrisy and ironic nature of their comments via *techné* in her application of humor and "hijacking." These strategies collectively serve to give Thunberg's followers a quick laugh and enable them to brush past comments from powerful politicians and humorously off-base critique. Many of the strategies in Chapter Four enable Thunberg and Fridays for Future to more fully engage their "capacity to act" without being stifled by the dominant discourses within critique. McKerrow's critique of freedom, employed in Chapter Four, provided insight into how Thunberg's Twitter presence enables further possibility through expanding "*freedom to pursue other power relations*" (McKerrow, 1991, p. 75).

Implications for Youth Climate Activists

Thunberg isn't serving so much as a figurehead for Fridays for Future in critics' characterizations, as she is serving as a proxy for any youth activist who speaks out on behalf of the planet. Thunberg is subject to "framing by foil" where critical "identity frames serve as *foils* against which the authors" of tweets "articulate their identities" (Cloud, 2009, 458). Cloud (2009) wrote about critics foiling her own identity in hate mail she had received, creating distinctions between Thunberg's critics and Cloud's. Yet Thunberg's critics, analogously to the authors of Cloud's hate mail, prove not to represent "random expression of deviant individuals," but, instead, "agents" of conservative or right-leaning political social movements (Cloud, 2009, 460). Critics not

only identify *themselves* in the *foiling* of Thunberg, they continually “craft” the identity of the movement they represent to “provide members a sense of potential efficacy in addressing their grievances” (Cloud, 2009, p. 460). Critic’s *foiling* of Thunberg’s identities not only undermines Thunberg’s agency, but increases their own “efficacy” and that of their movements. Increased “efficacy” reinforces the domination that accompanies critics’ predominantly privileged identities, or, the privilege that their attacks on Thunberg uphold. Cloud (2009) points out that “not only do individuals and groups define themselves in opposition to others, they *necessarily* do so in a social field organized in terms of hierarchy” (p. 460). Here, critics place themselves within normative, dominant identities that are associated globally with political power, rationality, adulthood, and ability: identities that have been assumed to be “higher up” on the social hierarchy than their *foils*.

In the case of critiques that fall into rhetoric of a conservative echo chamber, critics *foil* liberals. The rhetoric of some critics, typically those who ascribe to conservative conspiracies, “*foil*” Thunberg to the extent that they “negate” her or whatever “handler” is responsible for her in what Burke named the rhetorical “kill.” According to Cloud (2009): “The firmer the identity one seeks, the more polarizing the discourse of self-definition becomes, resulting in what Burke calls ultimate terms that glorify oneself and vilify the other” (p. 461). For instance, in the intense vilification of the left, or those who are “behind” Thunberg’s powerful platform, critics “negate” her or perform continued “symbolic purgation” of socialism by invoking Thunberg’s identities. In critique that depicts sexual violence against Thunberg, this rhetorical “negation” employs violence, “a

sanctioned dimension of hegemonic masculinity in U.S. culture” (Cloud, 2009, p. 470). The authors of hate mail directed at Cloud, and, I argue, Twitter users who depict sexual violence against Thunberg, wield “sexual violation as the ultimate correction to female insurrection,” which includes being “outspoken, critical women” (Cloud, 2009, p. 470). In these instances, critics entirely negate Thunberg’s agency. While not all of the critiques mentioned “vilify” Thunberg or those who are “behind” her activism to the extent of the rhetorical “kill,” each wounds Thunberg’s agency and thereby the agency of youth climate activists whom she serves as a proxy for.

The power of foiling Thunberg is apparent in the ways that critics focus on her identities. Cloud (2009) points out that the *foiling* of an “adversary” relies on the “power of naming” which applies “tremendous pressure to a target through the identification and invocation of psychological, economic, and physical vulnerabilities” (p. 458). As Thunberg is a proxy, young climate activists of all identities will likely face similarly “tremendous” and deeply-personal pressure applied by the conservative echo chamber. Luckily, Thunberg’s Twitter presence might prove a helpful resource for youth climate activists as they navigate critique and expand their movements. Thunberg’s Twitter presence and the strategies she employs to directly and indirectly respond to critique mentioned in Chapter Four provide an archived resource for youth climate activists to take up for the purpose of undercutting or rhetorically dodging the power of foiling and to build inclusive collective identity.

Within this archive, Fridays for Future activists will find Thunberg’s continual redirect of critique to the agency of the “external” of science. A rhetorical move reliant

on privilege that is situationally effective primarily for white, affluent, well-educated youth climate activists may be a tool that some can employ to render youth climate activist identity less relevant when responding to identity-based critique. This redirect relies on notions of “objectivity” and “authority” of scientific institutions, which bolster youth climate activist’s cause and are broadly valid, as methods, tools for exploration, and dedicated minds have checked and double-checked that the numbers in the IPCC report, for example, are reflective of realistic global circumstances. However, when looking closely and understanding science in a nuanced way, it becomes clear that what might seem to be “external” or “objective,” is also deeply evocative of identity, personal experience, and global bodily impact of the climate crisis. Science’s embeddedness with identity, in the case of Fridays for Future, becomes clear when understanding the greater and more prolonged impact that the climate crisis will have on youth, which Thunberg emphasizes in her advocacy. In a speech addressing the British House of Commons on April 23, 2019, Thunberg indicated that youth’s “future was sold so that small numbers of people could make unimaginable amounts of money” (WWF UK, 2019).

When the information in the IPCC reports, the effects of environmental racism, and the devastating cost of climate injustice are felt, or when it becomes clear that those of marginalized identities have been and will be affected more greatly over time, Thunberg and Fridays For Future’s message of “uniting behind the science” might feel less “external,” but instead immediate, intersectional, and deeply personal. In this way, an apparent dual-nature emerges: the science behind the climate crisis was produced by trained scientists whose authority relies on notions of “objectivity” and therefore might

be touted as “external” to identity, yet is also deeply felt, intensely intertwined with subjectivity, lived experience, and systems of power. With each prediction of warming or rising carbon dioxide levels comes impacts that fall and have fallen directly on bodies, all of whose identity impacts and are impacted by widely-varying current and future experience of the climate crisis. As stated in the IPCC Report, global warming and increased CO₂ levels “pose heightened risk to eradicating poverty, reducing inequalities, and ensuring human and ecosystem wellbeing” (“Special Report - Global Warming of 1.5°C,” 2018). So, Thunberg’s playing on the “objectivity” of science in response to critics proves strategically reductive. Yet within Fridays for Future and for those who begin to understand the numbers, live their impact, or are bearing and will bear the brunt of the climate crisis, intersectional movement building and the championing of broad subjectivities is central to “uniting behind the science,” as is the “aspect of equity” that Thunberg calls for. While Thunberg’s Twitter presence isn’t perfect, and her message doesn’t go in-depth on equity, which is critical to “uniting behind the science,” her page can be thought of as a jumping-off point for fostering intersectionality within networked youth activism (Thunberg, 2019u).

Thunberg’s Twitter presence wields the site’s affordances to “grow” the Fridays for Future “communicative ecology” in ways that render impotent the “naming” essential to critique aimed at foiling identity, and that instead speak towards intersectionality. Thunberg’s use of her Twitter page as a node in the Fridays for Future network enables fluid and co-constitutive collective identity that invites constant reshaping and growth while avoiding hierarchy. In this way, Thunberg’s Twitter presence supports connectivity

through creation of “identity reference [that] is more derived through inclusive and diverse large-scale personal expression...than through common group or ideological identification” (Foust & Drazner Hoyt, 2018, p. 44). Even as she redirects critics away from her identities and instead to the message of uniting behind science, Thunberg’s Twitter page enables meaning-making of Fridays for Future’s collective identification through the posting and revisiting of experiences, beliefs, and messages of herself and others. Thunberg’s spreading of the posts of diverse groups of youth activists within Fridays for Future globally could be a valuable strategy for youth activists looking to foster intersectional movement-building, build flexible collective identity, and lift up other voices. Spreading content through the Fridays for Future network “lay(s) down roots, shoots, and seeds” which “invite users to complete arguments and/or publicize experiences that connected them to the emergent collective identity” (Alfonzo & Foust, 2018, p. 94). Specifically, Thunberg’s use of hashtags and retweets to avoid re-centering herself is a rhetorical move that could be especially important for white youth climate activists in facilitating the spread of agency to constitute intersectional collective identity, a movement structure that proves particularly elusive for critics who target individual identity.

Thunberg’s spreading of agency has implications for youth activism beyond combatting critique reliant on identity: it helps to negate the myth of exceptionalism surrounding youth activism that reaffirms the youth deficit model. As mentioned in Chapter One, notions of a youth apathy crisis which assume that “youth activism is rare and very special,” prove inaccurate when scrolling through the digital archive of marches

and strikes on Thunberg's Twitter page. This notion of youth activist exceptionalism, while it likely has had an elevating effect on Thunberg's access to powerful, political, global platforms, "actually limits young people and is condescending" (Gordon & Taft, 2011, p. 1505). By filling her Twitter page with global youth activist-led demonstrations large and small, Thunberg's Twitter page can serve as a testament to the myth of youth exceptionalism that "imagin(es) activists identity to be an ordinary rather an exceptional achievement" and in doing so joins other "girl activists" in "provid(ing) narrative support for their efforts to mobilize...youth" (Taft, 2009, p. 44). Thunberg's page makes the youth activist identity more visible.

Thunberg has crafted herself as a "node" in the Fridays for Future network, but nevertheless she is an extremely influential presence, as the catalyst of the movement and with 4.1 million Twitter followers. Her large following and deep connection to Fridays for Future makes her page and actions on Twitter an important pedagogy not only to set an example for how inclusive collective identity might begin to be facilitated, but for templates of response that Fridays for Future activists and youth activists broadly can employ if and when they find themselves in a similar critique situation. Thunberg's championing of her own marginalized identities and differences serves as a powerful example for acceptance that can become a part of Fridays for Future's collective identity. Similarly, Thunberg's reframe of critique as progress, her use of irony and humor to elucidate hypocrisy, and her easy-going poking fun at powerful men in her bio can be noted as tools for other youth activists to take up for a laugh and to build collective identity in antagonism.

While Thunberg's Twitter page does represent a pedagogy for youth activists, there are limitations and caveats to engagement because of the embodied nature of activism and the realities of lived experience. Here, I return to Taft (2009), mentioned in Chapter One: "Girls' strategies for political contention are not homogenous or universal but are located in divergent national, racialized and class-specific communities, histories, and social movement cultures" (p. 8). There are a wide range of implications that identity and privilege have on advocacy, meaning that one activists' strategies, while they may be a helpful example or catalyst for ideas, are far from universally useful. Due to her privilege, Thunberg is able to employ rhetorical strategies and tactics that others can't safely access, might not want to engage, or may be less easily able to use based on their identities.

Thunberg's privilege likely enables her strategies and tactics to be more situationally effective for youth activists of privileged identities, and suggests that some of her strategies are more critical for privileged youth activists to take up, to question, or to extend. For instance, within the climate movement, white voices are often emphasized while climate activists of color, indigenous climate activists, and activists from the global south are continually ignored, silenced, or, in some instances, subject to violence. Systems of oppression, implicit and explicit media biases, and the flow of power make it especially important that privileged, white youth activists acknowledge their privilege and adopt rhetorical strategies that speak toward intersectional movement building, like using a platform to consensually lift up voices of fellow youth climate activists who would otherwise be silenced due to their identity. Privileged, white youth activists also

have the opportunity to question whether Thunberg's Twitter presence does enough to speak toward intersectionality and equity, champion climate justice, and center identity, as well as to interrogate her potentially divisive redirect from identity to the agency of science as central to Fridays for Future's message.

Thunberg's Twitter presence and Fridays for Future's questioning of assumptions surrounding who can advocate for the climate and what action in the name of science looks like also prove an opportunity for environmental communication. Despite disheartening lack of drastic change from world leaders to eliminate carbon dioxide emissions and being subject to critique meant to immobilize her, Thunberg's Twitter presence has nevertheless decreased "latent exigency" and aided in bridging of the "science-action gap" for young activists who have joined the movement and who are presently mobilize for the planet (Pezzullo, 2015; Moser & Dilling, 2011, p. 162). As evinced by the millions of youth activists who strike from school, the scientists, youth, and adults worldwide who have taken to the streets in support of "uniting behind the science," and Fridays for Future's expansive Twitter network, Thunberg's Twitter presence poses an opportunity for communicators of science to understand the extent to which youth climate activist's networked media might lead to systemic or political action for science, or fail to.

Both Thunberg and Fridays for Future have facilitated expansive social movement, but policy action from world leaders and those in positions to drastically improve carbon emissions has not occurred. In her address to world leaders at the COP25 conference in Madrid, Thunberg pointed to the fact that instead of finding "holistic solutions" to

alleviate the climate crisis at COP25, world leaders have instead spent efforts “negotiat(ing) loopholes” and “avoid(ing) raising (their) ambition” (Global News, 2019). She goes further to state that the real danger is not “inaction,” but is instead when “politicians and CEOs are making it look like real action is happening, when, in fact, almost nothing is being done apart from clever accounting and creative PR” (Global News, 2019). Thunberg’s comment speaks to the current state of the climate crisis in global politics and questions potential outcomes of growing pressure from youth activists: When pressed, will political and business efforts be spent on “holistic solutions,” or hegemonic lip-service? Will Thunberg’s direct advocacy and blunt admonishments have impact on carbon emissions? What impact might Fridays for Future and Thunberg’s rhetoric have on the climate or on the future of youth climate activism?

A Nod to Critical Rhetoric

In the opening to Chapter 7 of Robert Cox’s 2013 book *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*, he quotes Libby Lester: “Too often, we consider news and social networking as an either/or proposition. The circulation of environmental symbols and images will, in the future...rely on both” (p. 177). Lester was right, but for perhaps unanticipated reasons. First, Twitter as media has not only become many people’s primary news source, but politicians like Donald Trump have amplified the site’s political usage. Simultaneously, news sources have become ever-more polarized and some, ever-more removed from reality. Even “formal” political spheres now feature strikingly out-of-touch and dangerous misinformation. According to Cox (2013), the “most basic use” of social media surrounding the environment is sharing news and

information (p. 77). Given current context, sharing information surrounding science is far from a “basic” use of media, and has, for people like Greta Thunberg, become a form of activism that faces biting identity-based backlash. The circulation of environmental symbols and images does, indeed, rely on both news sources and social media information sharing so that platforms which promote “mass amateurization” can be sites of dispelling misinformation and ensuring that “fake news” is subject to the checks and balances that stem from individual Twitter user’s and networked movement’s ability to widely and publically intervene. However, as demonstrated in Chapter Three, media sites like Twitter can also exacerbate and reaffirm polarization, the spread of falsified information, and conspiracy. With much false information circulating and muddling reality, power dynamics at play that may be covert or glaring exerting their influence in online spaces, and no time to waste as the climate crisis’ urgency rapidly escalates, McKerrow’s critical rhetoric, which reveals how power functions and how space for possibility to act is created, becomes valuable.

Critical rhetoricians might practice critique of domination to expose how discourses of power “flow” for the purpose of “maintaining [the dominant class’s] social role,” helping to elucidate oppressive discourses toward an “emancipatory purpose” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 96). Within Twitter, an online space that fosters expansive networks, the convening of power might be less apparent, though no less impactful. Through this analysis and bolstered by the observations of journalists, among others, Thunberg’s critics were found to embody dominant identities and espouse oppressive ideologies such as white power or at least whiteness, sexism and toxic masculinity,

ableism, and ageist assumptions that dismiss youth. If heeded, such ideologies would reaffirm oppression. The importance in documentation of dominance might enable the possibility of liberation stemming from “unmask(ing)” or “demystify(ing)” harmful “discourses of power” (Kearl, 2015, p. 67). Power, which “create(s) and sustain(s) the social practices which control the dominated” might diminish agency, foster the existence of the “science-action gap,” or increase likelihood for deferred action and “latent exigency” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 92). In elucidating the power in critique directed at Thunberg, the critique of domination opens the possibility for “*freedom from* powers of oppression” in their naming (McKerrow, 1991, p. 75).

McKerrow’s critique of freedom, the goal of which is to begin to enable “*freedom to* pursue other power relations,” enabled me to identify where Thunberg has created possibility for herself and for Fridays for Future youth activists to enact and amplify agency (McKerrow, 1991, p. 75). In this paper, critique of freedom helped me as rhetorical critic to point to strategies, practices, spaces, places, and methods employed by Thunberg which expand possibility for action, while acknowledging that never-ending skepticism and continued critique add to the eventual possibility of this work. The strategies identified here in Thunberg’s Twitter presence and in her response to critics provide possibility for youth activists to expand and spread agency among followers. Specifically, Thunberg’s construction of her page as an archived, networked node, in which she facilitates other’s voices with systems of power in mind, is a noteworthy starting point for youth climate activists, especially those with privilege, to consider taking up as a model for fostering collective action. While other strategies Thunberg

employs provide lesser possibility for intersectional engagement, like appeals to the agency of science as a strategy to shirk identity, their exploration here might enable possibility for them to be acknowledged, critiqued, built upon, or shifted by future youth climate activists.

In the critique of freedom, as is true in Chapter Four of this thesis: “results are never satisfying as the new social relations which emerge from a reaction to a critique are themselves simply new forms of power and hence subject to renewed skepticism.” While this may, at first, seem discouraging, “attempts at transformation do not end in futility,” as “to question the self-evidence of a form of experience, knowledge, or power, is to free it for our purposes, to open new possibilities for thought and action” (Rajchman, 1985, p. 4 cited in McKerrow 1991, p. 97). Critique of freedom’s reliance on never-ending skepticism is particularly important in this paper, as agency is centered. Agency, too, as Campbell (2005) describes, isn’t exclusively liberating as it is “perverse...inherently protean, ambiguous,” and “open to reversal” (p. 1). According to Ganesh (2015), agency creates “random, uncontrolled, indiscriminate, and manifold connections between people and things,” and is “increasingly autonomous and decoupled from institutional constraints, but at the same time reinscrib(es) relations of domination in peculiar new ways” (p. 482). So, when Thunberg amplifies her own agency or facilitates the agency of Fridays for Future, she likely reifies domination in ways that can be elucidated by future rhetorical critics.

Intersectionality, Crenshaw’s metaphor for understanding how “multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage...create obstacles that often are not understood within

conventional ways of thinking,” is important to this thesis and to my practice of rhetorical criticism. Intersectionality enabled me to engage a nuanced understanding of identity and employ a more critical and complex practice of rhetorical criticism (National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), 2018). As an important “tool to interrogate and intervene in the social plane,” intersectionality, along with Wanzer (2011)’s work on agency, deepened my understanding of collective identity and group creation, as group identification can occur around “shared interactions” with “social institutions, organizational structure, patterns of social interaction and a constellation of experiences,” (Cho et al., 2013, p. 787; Kearl, 2015, p. 68). Intersectional understanding of collective identity formation “thus balances the theoretical interrogation and practical negotiation of oppression” (Kearl, 2015, p. 68). Intersectionality reaffirms the importance of Ono & Sloop (1992)’s commitment to *telos* in rhetorical criticism, as well as the “never ending” critique called for in McKerrow’s critique of freedom. My primarily-privileged identities, as an adult, white, heterosexual, cis-female, collectively impact my stance as rhetorical critic, necessitate the partiality of analysis provided here, and also likely reaffirm dominance in “unexpected ways,” even in my effort to “demystify” power. While this thesis provides results that were never going to be fully “satisfying,” my work will hopefully spark “new possibilities for thought and action,” and in turn help further illuminate rhetorical strategies that progress the youth climate movement’s ability to catalyze intersectional action.

Possibilities for Future Research

While this thesis confirms some of the constraints that scholars have identified for youth activists, it also complicates the rhetorical situation of youth activism by situating it within the climate movement and an anti-Thunberg conservative echo chamber. As I elaborated in this final chapter, critical rhetoric is important to elucidate the foiling that conservative discourses perform against Thunberg and Fridays for Future and identify actionable possibilities for discourse in response as well as for bolstering youth activism to foster resiliency in the face of these discourses. However, there is still much work to be done and are many more discourses to be explored that extend beyond the scope of this paper.

For social movement scholars, climate crisis communicators, and environmental scholars, questions surrounding Thunberg and Fridays for Future's impact on "latent exigency" and the "science-action gap" remain: have these youth activists sparked enough urgency to create change? Will their efforts close the gap? Further, work needs to be done to continue to understand how the climate movement, which relies on belief in science, can foster inclusivity and intersectional collective identity while navigating notions of trust in "objectivity" that are critical to bolstering legitimacy but that may function to marginalize.

For youth activism scholars, questions stemming from Thunberg's appeal to the agency of science appear and are left unresolved, as well. Does Thunberg's rhetorical redirect from her identity to science undermine the credibility of youth broadly in reaffirming the agency of adults and institutions in message-creation, while posing

children as mere messengers? What are the possibilities and limitations of youth activism within the context of climate activism? What might be the impact of Thunberg's rhetoric that situationally implicates or shirks off childhood be? Does her oscillation impact or interplay with discourses surrounding youth activism? What would Fridays for Future youth activists around the globe say about how Thunberg's Twitter presence has influenced them?

Patterns of critique within the tweets analyzed that weren't addressed in this thesis, like constructions of Thunberg as a cult leader or religious saint, are similarly steeped with dominant discourses of identity and otherness. Critics here point to Thunberg's supposed virtue-signaling, witch-like nature, or cultish following as means of undermining her or her message. Other critiques feature Thunberg as brainwashed to an extent that she's posed as horrific or scary. For example, one Tweet posed Thunberg as one of the "Children of the Corn," alluding to a horror film, while another included a photo shopped image of Thunberg with red laser eyes. In future work, understanding critique of Thunberg with a lens of otherness via monstrosity or monstrous femininity could shed even more light on the dominance explored here.

Finally, with rapidly-changing context continually altering the situation of youth climate activism, more work is essential. As mentioned in Chapter One, worsening conditions due to the climate crisis increasingly shift communicative conditions, and climate activists' messages and strategies will need to shift as well. Even as this thesis was being written, the COVID-19 pandemic was and is still sweeping the world and will likely impact modern society in unexpected ways, including possibly effecting the degree

of belief in science and scientific institutions. Further, as Thunberg pointed out, COVID-19 has made clear that quick action in the face of crisis is possible: “The coronavirus is a terrible event...there is no positive to come out of it...But it also shows one thing: That once we are in a crisis, we can act to do something quickly” (Goering, 2020). Proof that quick action from people, governments, and businesses is possible will likely also impact how youth climate activists call for rapid change.

While Thunberg’s Twitter presence isn’t perfect by any means, I found her to champion difference in the face of discourses that marginalize, wield the liberation that can come from humor, and to have crafted an archive that strategically employs Twitter’s manifold affordances to lift up Fridays for Future and other youth activists across the globe. Her page provides potential strategies for youth climate activists to use as suggestions or jumping-off points to foster a more inclusive, intersectional climate movement and serves as a testament to the power of youth activism and to Twitter as a site for networked social movement. I hope that readers of this thesis and youth activists see the possibility in Thunberg’s Twitter presence that I did, and extend that possibility far beyond her page to further action for the climate. I also hope that youth activist readers might now be better equipped to bolster themselves against and respond to the domination at play in critiques of Thunberg. Finally, I hope that those who study climate crisis communication might continue to focus on the importance of identity and agency when considering communicating the urgency of science, and to further question and explore the implications of pointing to science as “objective” or “external” to identity.

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guess they must simply feel so threatened by us. [Tweet]. Twitter.

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Thunberg, G. [@GretaThunberg]. (2019j, December 4). The endless conspiracy theories and denial of facts. The lies, hate and bullying of children who communicate and act on the science. All because some adults - terrified of change - so desperately don't want to talk about the #ClimateCrisis This is hope in disguise. We're winning. [Tweet with photograph]. Twitter.

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Thunberg, G. [@GretaThunberg]. (2019l, August 31). I'm not public about my diagnosis to "hide" behind it, but because I know many ignorant people still see it as an "illness", or something negative. And believe me, my diagnosis has limited me before... [Tweet]. Twitter.

<https://twitter.com/GretaThunberg/status/1167916636394754049>

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more I read about the climate crisis the more I realise how critical feminism is. We can't live in a sustainable world unless all genders and people are treated equally #8march [Tweet with photograph]. Twitter.

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Thunberg, G. [@GretaThunberg]. (2019r, August 1). I am indeed "deeply disturbed" about the fact that these hate and conspiracy campaigns are allowed to go on and

on just because we children communicate and act on the science. Where are the adults? [Tweet with photograph of *Herald Sun* tweet]. Twitter.

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Thunberg, G. [@GretaThunberg]. (2019s, October 31). So today is Halloween. I don't celebrate it back home, but I thought I might give it a try. And apparently when it comes to scaring a bunch of angry climate crisis deniers - I don't even have to dress up!! #trickortreat [Tweet with photograph]. Twitter.

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Thunberg, G. [@GretaThunberg]. (2019t, December 8). Indigenous people are literally being murdered for trying to protect the forrest [sic] from illegal deforestation. Over and over again. It is shameful that the world remains silent about this. [Tweet with retweet from @ajplus]. Twitter.

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Thunberg, G. [@GretaThunberg]. (2019u, July 17). The aspect of equity - clearly stated throughout the Paris Agreement - is absolutely necessary to make that agreement work on a global scale. No emission target leaving out that aspect will be enough. #ClimateEmergency [Tweet with retweet of *Sky News*' video]. Twitter.

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<https://twitter.com/GretaThunberg/status/1222135195148726272>

Thunberg, G. [@GretaThunberg]. (2020e, January 8). Africa is so hugely underreported when it comes to the climate crisis (as well as everything else...). If you have a platform - help amplify the voices and stories from Africa. Africa has a key role

in the fight for climate justice. Please acknowledge and share their perspective.

[Tweet with retweet from @vanessa_vash]. Twitter.

<https://twitter.com/GretaThunberg/status/1214980919083372545>

Thunberg, G. [@GretaThunberg]. (2020f, March 6). In Mumbai today!

#FridaysForFuture #ClimateStrike #schoolstrike4climate [Tweet with retweet from @LicypriyaK]. Twitter.

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30'000 people in the pouring rain today in Bristol! #fridaysforfuture

@schoolstrike4climate #climatestrike [Tweet with four photographs]. Twitter.

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and we recognise that women are still far from equal to men in today's societies.

We can not have climate justice without gender equity. And remember; what we women want today - and every day - is equality, not congratulations or celebrations. [Tweet with photograph]. Twitter.

<https://twitter.com/GretaThunberg/status/1236615590560890880>

Thunberg, G. [@GretaThunberg]. (2020j, March 28). “I’m very tiny and I am very emotional, and that is not something people usually associate with strength.” I’m on the cover of the @RollingStone special Climate Crisis Issue. “We need to care about each other more.” @obeygiant rollingstone.com/politics/polit...[Tweet with photograph]. Twitter.

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Trump, D. [@realDonaldTrump]. (2019b, December 12). So ridiculous. Greta must work on her Anger Management problem, then go to a good old fashioned movie with a friend! Chill Greta, Chill! [Tweet with retweet from @RealRomaDowney].

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[Tweet with retweet from @Shehzad_Ind]. Twitter.

<https://twitter.com/ShefVaidya/status/1180575458087170048>

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policy, my six year old daughter is available [Tweet]. Twitter.

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