The Art Of Resistance: An Arts Based Understanding Of Activism

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THE ART OF RESISTANCE: AN ARTS BASED UNDERSTANDING OF ACTIVISM

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Foundations of Education
College of Education
University of South Carolina
2018
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DEDICATION

To the killjoys — those who don’t belong but remake the space for those who come after us.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This endeavor would not have been possible without the support of many people. First and foremost is my partner, Kate. She has put up with my ridiculousness for many years now and has been with me the entirety of this academic journey. During this time, we moved in together, we got married, and made our family bigger by one, and are now preparing to move halfway across the country. You are my best friend, best cheerleader (whether triathlon, marathon, or dissertation), and the best of wives and best of women. I write this as Liam is sleeping in the next room. I love you. I'm sorry for stealing hours away from you to write. While your smile and laugh often pulled me away from work, you always re-centered me and encouraged me to go on.

Of course, my wonderful family helped me and supported me along this journey. My mom has always been my rock and I appreciate her always. My father challenges me to think about ideas and issues from multiple perspectives, and was in many ways, my first post-structural teacher. My brother inspires me, makes me laugh, and reminds me of the little kids that we once were. Thank you all for this! To my mother-in-law and my father-in-law, your un-ending confidence in me has always meant the world. Thank you for this. To my brother-in-law, thank you for making me laugh and always being willing to go on a Wawa run. I love you all!

My committee is made up of four of the smartest and most amazing individuals I have ever known and I have been thrilled and honored to work with all four of you over the course of my academic career. Thank you all for everything that you have given to
me, my family, and this project. To my chair, Allison, from my very first class with you in 2013, you have inspired me, pushed me, and affirmed me. Without your guidance and support, I wouldn’t be here. To Payal, thank you for pushing me to be more critical and thoughtful in my scholarship and teaching. To Daniella, thank you for believing in me and supporting me. Carla, thank you for all your guidance, humor, and advice.

To all the faculty members who have given me advice and love over my time here not only in the College of Education (Payal, Kara, Michelle, Jenny, Christian, and Spencer) but also in Women Studies (Carla, Ed, Danny, Emily, Drue, and Suzanne), and AFAM (Nancy and Todd), I appreciate your mentorship and I will pay it forward. To my OMSAFam, thank you for being a part of me. Though I leave you physically, you will always be with me in my heart. To my Foundations Peeps: Tim, Salandra, Dalisha, Binda, Bry, Hadrian, and Devin thanks for all the conversations and support. To my writing partners: Travis, Nora, Toniqua, and Myles thank you for always pushing me and making me smile. To all those in student affairs, thanks for the work that you do for our community. Anyone else that has supported me through this journey, thank you. Even if you are not named, I appreciate you and all that you have done for me.
ABSTRACT

In this project, the researcher explored the ways that millennial activists articulated the role of emotions in their activisms through artistic means. Specifically, through the production of zines, a format that eschews standardization but often reflect non-dominant positionalities, millennial activists explored their articulations, experiences, and engagement with activism. Informed by arts-based research (ABR) the researcher analyzed data from an emic perspective. Analyzing the experiences of the 14 millennial activists who reflected a heterogeneous group, the researcher represents eight themes: the demands of artistry; building community; distance in families of birth; resistance to oppression; emotion; mental health, self-care, and guilt; the South; and social media. This study makes scholarly contributions to the empirical, theoretical, and methodological spheres of education research, and student activism and is a resource for educational researchers, scholar-activists, and university administrators who work in community with young adult activists. Specifically, implications from the research include among others: changes in support and policy for historically underrepresented students, and campus response to hate-inciting speakers and events on and near college campuses, the incorporation of new technologies in student affairs outreach, new formations of university leadership, and a call for universities to be proactive to support historically underrepresented students.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION
Situating Myself

For the past decade I have worked in some capacity in student services at a large school in the South. As a progressive-minded individual, who often would question institutional traditions that privilege historically dominant groups, namely those positioned by white, cisgender, heterosexual masculinity, often I received pushback from other administrators. I was told that “we” were a “southern” or “conservative” institution. Working with our students of Color on campus, I was reminded by upper-administrators that we were a predominantly White institution (PWI). To that end, I name my site as SCPWI, or Southern Conservative Predominantly White institution as the pseudonym. While not all the individuals at SCPWI were White, or southern, or conservative, many were. And for some student on campus, anecdotally, SCPWI was the most liberal space they had lived (as discussed in Chapter 5).

On November the 16th, 2015 I received word that many of the students with whom I had worked were planning a walk-out. I had been organizing with some of these same students for an international game day as part of the kick-off for the institution-backed international education week, and we had been working together for months. When none of the students showed up to set up for the event, I was concerned and confused. Standing there wondering what had happened, I heard that at approximately 11 a.m. there was going to be a walk-out on campus, another episode in the campus-based activism that had been ignited across the country, starting at the University of Missouri
where students and student athletes staged a walk-out to protest the lack of action to combat racism on campus (Frizell, 2015). I walked with my then supervisor to watch the walk-out but was explicitly told by her to not walk with the students and to not engage with them, so as to not appear to be taking their side in the walk-out.

Over a quarter mile the group of students walked from an academic building where they had gathered, across our historic quad and directly onto the patio of the university’s administration building. They read a two-page letter addressed to the president and disseminated it among the students who joined them in the walkout (Randall, 2017). Following the address, they delivered a copy to the administration. The letter contained a list of 12 demands, reflecting needs of a variety of marginalized campus-based communities that were often overlooked by the administration. The list became known as the #2020Vision, as the students who developed it called for their demands to be met by 2020.

While I was quite close with a number of the leaders of this movement, they purposely left me and my supervisor in the dark about their plans, so as to not implicate us in their activism. They knew that we would get in trouble for assisting them. This was evident after the event, when despite the absence of engagement with our office at a forum with the president and other upper-administration, upper-administrators stated that the students had the multicultural center to assist them. The students had remarked earlier that we were “overworked” and “exhausted” as a way to advocate for us and the work of the office but their characterization seemed to confirm in the minds of upper-administrators that my supervisor and I were actually the ones behind the walk-out. Despite the students’ best efforts, I was marked from that moment on by upper-
administrators as a trouble-maker. They refused to believe that the students had come up with the plan on their own and instead chose to charge me and my supervisor with having given them direction on what to do. From that moment forward, upper-administrators began targeting me directly for small infractions, such as wearing inappropriate footwear to work. I was constantly reminded by them that SCPWI was a “southern, conservative” institution and that working toward equity and justice was not appropriate “here”. These were messages that I received not only implicitly, but also directly in statements to me from university leadership. Due to a mismatch of values regarding the inclusion of marginalized voices, my career as a student affairs professional was inhibited by staying at SCPWI. I stayed much longer than I should have due to my love of the students with whom I worked, but also because I in a doctoral program at a nearby university, and I was determined to finish.

Just two years later, on November 8th of 2016, the election of Donald Trump changed the way that I saw the world. I knew that oppression in the forms of racism, sexism, and nativism was real, but I neglected to consider how these oppressions could potentially figure into something such as a national election. The next day, on November 9, 2016, the multicultural center hosted space in our lounge for university students who were feeling scared, hurt, and fearful; my supervisor and I worked all day to be with students. While there were students on campus who were excited about the election, my experiences were centered around the support of the students crying in my office. My supervisor and I were hurt, scared, and fearful, too. On November 11th, the Friday of that week, I was facilitating a Safe Zone for faculty and staff as part of the university’s creed and diversity week. The presentation was hard, because many of the participants had
signed up last minute, anxious to learn how to support LGBTQ students in the wake of the Trump election. At that point, perhaps even now, I had no idea how they might support LGBTQ students.

That Friday afternoon, there was a gathering on the quad; university students called it a “vigil”. They met and spread the word through social media to any and all students, faculty, and staff who might feel scared, hurt, or fearful in the wake of the election and invited them to come be in community with one another. One of the faculty members from the Safe Zone training earlier that day was there, and I remember thinking that was good to see. As my supervisor and I had done when we learned about the walkout, we walked over to the gathering, but we had been told explicitly by her supervisor that we were not to go, that doing so would “increase the size” of the “target on my back” as a “trouble-maker” at the institution. I was not able to do my job, which was to support marginalized students, nor was I able to be publicly in community with others who felt scared, hurt, and fearful.

**Statement of the Problem**

Since the inauguration of Trump there have been an onslaught of attacks on marginalized communities. These attacks have produced public protest and a rise in activism (Sydell, 2017). For instance, instances of activism regarding news that President Trump would dismantle Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) caused marches in Washington DC, New York City, and other cities, just days after the leak of this information in September 2017 (Cole, 2017; Valdes, 2017). In response to changing educational policy related to Title IX, Betsy DeVos, Trump’s controversial Secretary of Education, has faced massive backlash and protests for her actions (Balingit & Larimer,
Protestors documented the inexperience and ignorance of DeVos regarding federal law. As soon as Trump announced Senator Jeff Sessions for Attorney General, activists protested the nomination which included a response from over 1,100 law faculty from across the country who penned a letter rejecting his nomination due to Sessions’ anti-civil rights positions (Verhovek, 2017). Since his confirmation Sessions has reversed President Obama-era positions on drugs and crimes and reverted to using language reminiscent of the 1950s or 1960s about drugs, race, and immigration (Chang, 2016; Fretland & Jones, 2017). Actions against DeVos and Sessions were quickly organized and disseminated by new media platforms such as Twitter™ and Facebook™. The use of social media to organize across physical space¹ has been integral to many of these moments of activism, brought to the fore through the use of hashtags, short phrases preceded with a #, which enabled easy cataloging and searching of posts.

Activists responded quickly to other policy changes as well, in particular Executive Order 13769, titled Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States, more often referred to as the Muslim Ban, and the repeal of DACA. The Executive Order placed a temporary ban on entry to the United States, with the exception of U.S. citizens, for those traveling from Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Iran, Somalia, Libya, and Yemen, predominantly Muslim majority nations (Department of Homeland Security, 2017). The ban provoked a great deal of outrage, and activists and lawyers responded by taking to the airports within hours of the announcement of the bill to work on the behalf

¹ The use of social media for activism is largely initially credited to the Arab Spring movement (Howard et al., 2011)
of anyone affected by the Order and arriving in the U.S. Lawyers were among the 
protestors and supported individuals from these nations with free legal assistance upon 
arrival (J. E. Bromwich, 2017)

This routine questioning of U.S. and non-U.S. citizens marked as outsiders and 
raced Brown and Black by enactors of a White supremacist state returned us to a political 
moment just after 9/11\(^2\). During the era that followed 9/11, many people perceived as 
potentially Muslim and/or from the Middle-East\(^3\) were targeted and profiled and illegally 
detained. Trump’s Executive Order 13769 which halted travel and immigration from 
specific Muslim majority countries was reminiscent of the intense xenophobia that arose 
post 9/11\(^4\).

Social media was essential from the first moment of what became the largest 
single-day protest in U.S. history (Broomfield, 2017). The Women’s March, which took 
place in Washington, D.C., as well as many other cities, the day after Trump’s 
inauguration was meant to send a “bold message to our new government on their first day 
in office, and to the world that women's rights are human rights” (Lapowsky, 2017; 
Tatum, 2017, p. np). The event took off like wildfire. The day after the election, Teresa 
Shook\(^5\) created a page for a hypothetical march, and by the next morning, she had over

\(^2\) A series of coordinated terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda on the United States on September 11, 2001.
\(^3\) Or erroneously assumed as such as many Sikhs were also targeted (Puar, 2007).
\(^4\) This era was so rife with an us vs. them mentality that the House of Representatives cafeteria stopped 
serving French Fries and began serving Freedom Fries as France critiqued American policies post 9/11 
(Silver, 2011).
\(^5\) A woman from Hawaii who took to social media to plan the Women’s March for the day after Trump’s 
inauguration.
10,000 responses. Organizing was made possible across the country through social media platform Facebook™.

Through my study, I intended to better understand young adult activism, and intersections of activisms in the historical context of the Trump administration. Without studying this phenomenon now, we lose access to understanding this moment of activist response to the retrenchment of White supremacist, cisheteropatriarchal politics in the White House. My research question guiding this study was: How do young adults experience and articulate the role of emotions in the activism in which they engage?

I am particularly interested in the role of emotions in activism for two reasons. First, Baruch Spinoza (1677/1992) posited that the conatus, or the tendency to self-preservation through action, was caused by emotion. As such I wanted to explore connections between emotion and action. Second, in modern history often emotions have been derided as being irrational (Jaggar, 1989), and I want to counter their dismissal. Through this project I intend to challenge lines of argumentation that reflect that idea that because activisms are emotionally driven that they are irrational. Turning to Spinoza, I embrace his understanding of emotionality.

Jaggar (1989) argued that emotional research has long been devalued by Western scientific traditions and that rationality has been valued for its role in acquiring knowledge. Further, when emotion and rationality are cast as diametrically opposed, rationality has been associated with “the universal, the public and the male, whereas emotion has been associated with the irrational, the physical, the natural, the particular, the private and, of course, the female” (p. 151). Echoing Jaggar (1989), Polletta, Jasper,
& Goodwin (2001), and Ahmed (2004, 2014), I argued that emotions were vital to engagement for activists, because they intersected with actions of subversion and refusal (Calhoun, 2001; Félix Guattari & Stivale, 2009; Polletta et al., 2001). In this moment many positions of refusal are against Trump, his administration and its policies. I anticipated an analysis that would address both the materiality of experiences with activism and the effects of an administration that reifies a White supremacist cisheteropatriarchal order. As you will see in Chapter 5, data reflects much of the former, the materiality of experiences with activism and in some ways the effects of the Trump administration and its policies.

I have chosen to focus on young adults for two reasons. First, in the last decade I have witnessed a rise of interest in social justice issues and activism among college-aged individuals. Further, I believe that young adults, who came of age with the rise of social media, have used this technology to craft new communities. These communities are not bound in the same ways in which communities were once bound, such as spatially or racially, and for this reason, the contemporary activisms have arisen faster than in other historical contexts (Gerbaudo, 2012; Idle & Nunns, 2011) and have been more intersectional nature (Bailey, 2017; Carney, 2016; Randall, 2017).

Methodologically, I used art-based research methods to explore young adults’ engagement and resistance. Through a series of art sessions, artists produced artistic representations that reflected their community building as a group; familial distance; resistance to oppression; emotions of love, pride, and guilt; regional identities; and the use of social media. My intent was to speak back to the effects of a White supremacist cisheteropatriarchal administration in our current body politic, in order to “explore and
expose [power] and welcome the opportunity to subvert it in the name of social justice” (Pelias, 2007, p. 188). As I prepared for data coding and analysis, I planned to analyze data from an intersectional standpoint (Crenshaw, 1991). I believe that in the wake of the contemporary rise of White nationalism on a global scale (Giroux, 2017a) we have seen an increase in activist response that focuses on an intersectional approach to justice. I frame my understanding of justice from an intersectional standpoint and believe that justice needs to be addressed not just for one queered community but for all (Crenshaw, 1991). In Chapter 5 I represent intersectional commitments that some of the artists expressed.

Further, I came to this study from a critical perspective, one that researchers adopt to examine power relations inherent in interpersonal relationships (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2012). Additionally, I came to this project from a perspective framed by queer theory. I think of “queer” not as solely sexuality, but of transgression (Anzaldúa, 2010) against the regimes of the normal (Warner, 1993). Taking a queer perspective means questioning the unity of identity, dismantling (supposed) binaries, and exposing power structures that are complex (Walters, 1996). Further, with practicable implications in mind, I share a critical dissatisfaction with the ways institutions of higher education have come to serve as cogs in a machine of “diversity management” rather than radical inclusion (Puar, 2007). These ideas helped me in understanding how institutions (governmental, educational, non-governmental) have come to situate themselves in relation to refusals of the status quo. As a student affairs professional and educator, often I think we are quick to deal with activism, listening to respond, rather than listening to
understand. What might we hear if we listened to understand? I offer one representation of refusals here from millennial activists and invite you to listen to understand.

**Context**

On January the 20th of 2017 a new era began—an era of anxieties, fear, hopelessness, and despair for some—for others, a chance to Make America Great Again (MAGA™) (D. Trump, 2016) The day was overcast and cloudy, both where I was in South Carolina but also in Washington DC at the inauguration of the 45th president of the United States. This cloud seemed to reflect the collective fears and anxieties of the communities that I name as part of my life and had coalesced into a cloud. Thus, began the presidency of Donald Trump for me. Amidst this historic event, one which Ta-Nehisi Coates (2017) called the ascendancy of the first White president, came responses of varied activisms. These moments of activism coincided with a collective anxiety surrounding the erosion of democratic norms by the actions of the commander in chief, which are still on-going more nearly two years after his election (American Psychological Association, 2017; Sifferlin, 2017).

For some, such as Coates (2017), the ascendancy of Trump to the presidency was a direct response to the election of President Barack Obama, who was historically elected as the United States’ first President of Color in 2008 and 2012. Trump leveraged racialized actions over the course of President Obama’s presidency to his own ends, such as his persistent questioning of President Obama’s citizenship⁶ (Coates, 2017). Trump’s

⁶ Also known as birtherism, it was this persistent questioning, spearheaded by then business man Donald Trump that finally got President Barack Obama to release his long form birth certificate during his second term (Graham, 2016).
rise to power, built on a legacy of racism and directed toward President Obama, represented a racist backlash against the Obama presidency itself. Trump was merely the embodiment of broader racist backlash that peaked in response to the Obama presidency (Hughey, 2014; Inglehart & Norris, 2016). The Trump presidency has been consumed thus far with undoing the legacy of his predecessor. This is evidenced by the many noted attacks on of President Obama signature accomplishments. These include repeated and continued attacks on the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act\(^7\); the attack on Trans members of the military (Philipps, 2017), a reversal in environmental policies numbering at least 60\(^8\); a change in priorities in drug policy\(^9\); the change in direction in addressing sexual assault on college campuses (Department of Education, 2017; Saul & Taylor, 2017); creating confusion regarding gender rights through the rescinding of the dear colleague letter (Somashkhar, Brown, & Balingit, 2017); contempt for international treaties, agreements, and norms\(^10\); and the foreclosure on the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA); and beginning a “war on immigrants” (Huerta, 2017). Each of these changes in federal policy can be viewed as an attack on a group of people who challenge the nostalgic whitestream (Grande, 2003) narrative of what the United States used to be, and this is evident in the temporal nature of President Trump’s signature

\(^7\) One of Trump’s first acts in office, this Executive Order was signed the same day as his inauguration (Horsley, 2017).
\(^8\) This includes the overturn of bans on harmful pesticides, allowing the continuation of the Dakota Access pipeline, and the largest rollback of federal land protection in history (Popovich, 2017; Turkewitz, 2017)
\(^9\) Despite information to the contrary, the War on Drugs has increased our prison population, decreased illegal drug prices, militarized our police force, created for-profit prisons. This being all at the expense of the taxpayer (Winslow, 2017)
\(^10\) This is inclusive of reneging on the Paris Climate Accord (Liptak, 2017) and questioning if the sanctions enforced by Iran were being followed (Schwartz, 2018), not to mention his careless tweeting with Kim Jung Un escalating nuclear tensions between the U.S. and North Korea (Manchester, 2018).
campaign phrase, “Make America Great Again”. This phrase reflected a notion of a return to a time in which the United States was great. I believe, due to the rhetoric and actions used in conjunction with the phrase, this return in time is tied up with moments of U.S. history saturated with racism, misogyny, homophobia, and other forms of bigotry. To “MAGA” asks us to misremember history and to neglect our commitments to equity in the name of a misremembered past. There is no return to make. A reference to an earlier epoch is a reference to a time when people of Color, when women, when queer people, when immigrants, when poor people presented less challenge to the hegemony of normative U.S. discourse and politics.

During President Obama’s term in office, widespread efforts to achieve rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans (LGBT) people were realized. These included the passage of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which expanded the definition of hate crimes to include gender and sexuality. Under the leadership of President Obama “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell”\(^1\) was repealed, which allowed LGBT service members to serve openly in the military without fear of being discharged from the military. These changes helped to pave the way for the Supreme Court decision in Obergefell v. Hodges, which effectively legalized same-sex marriages\(^2\). Trump un-did the legacy of military inclusion with his order to disqualify transgender people who had

\(^1\) Don’t Ask Don’t Tell was the official US policy in regards to lesbian, gay, and bisexual people in the military. This was instituted by the Clinton administration in 1993 (Department of Defense, 1993).
\(^2\) While President Obama’s legacy is not one of effusive support for LGBT people, it was a time in which many efforts were made to achieve rights, even if in a neoliberal homonormative (Duggan, 2004) manner, for LGBT people.
“undergone gender transition” (H. Cooper & Gibbons-Neff, 2018). This act had no guidance on Trans individuals who are currently serving.

During the Obama Presidency, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 was expanded to include Trans students so they would be entitled to accommodations and protections under Title IX. Initially, Title IX addressed discrimination based on sex. In 2013, Title IX was expanded to include an understanding that “sexual harassment of students, including sexual violence, interferes with students’ right to receive an education free from discrimination and, in the case of sexual violence, is a crime” (Office of the Assistant Secretary, 2013, p. np). The expansion extended “to claims of discrimination based on gender identity or failure to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity or femininity and OCR accepts such complaints for investigation” (Lhamon, 2014, p. 5). During the first year of the Trump presidency in September 2017 under the leadership of DeVos, sexual violence as an interference with a student’s right to an education was removed from Title IX (Silva, 2017).

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, often commonly referred to as just the Affordable Care Act (ACA) serves as a way to ensure that all citizens of the United States have access to affordable healthcare. It is an act that many conservative politicians opposed. This act, colloquially known as “Obamacare”, has been under attack since its enactment in March of 2010. In fact, one bill introduced the day after the ACA
was initially signed in an attempt to repeal the ACA\textsuperscript{13} (O’Brien, 2010). The promise to repeal Obamacare was a signature piece of the platform on which Trump ran for election.

We have also witnessed an onslaught of changes in environmental policy that is detrimental not only to the environment itself, but those who live, work, and play in the natural world. With Trump’s long-established record of denying climate change, this was perhaps of no surprise. Trump has stated that “the concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive” (D. J. Trump, 2012). He also appointed Scott Pruitt, the self-proclaimed “leading advocate against the EPA’s activist agenda” (State of Oklahoma, 2017, p. np) and a denier of climate change (Davenport & Lipton, 2016) as the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Under the Trump administration, the completion of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) took place in 2017. Moreover, under his administration, he hastened the approval for both DAPL and the Keystone XL oil pipelines in spite of much opposition from activists (Greshko, Parker, & Clark Howard, 2018). Shortly after the approval of DAPL, another pipeline burst, leaking 176,000 gallons of oil (Hawkins, 2016), the primary concern of environmental activists protesting the building of these pipelines. This rupture of the pipeline put at risk the water supplies of individuals living and farming near these pipelines (Hawkins, 2016).

\textsuperscript{13} While the ACA is a step closer to ensuring that all have access and health-insurance through an individual mandate, it stops short of universal coverage and can be seen as an attempt to be moderate, too conservative for some progressives, and too socialist for some conservatives.
Eric Holder, President Obama’s attorney general from February of 2009 until April of 2015, began dismantling the use of mandatory minimum sentencing for low level, non-violent, drug-related crimes. Mandatory minimums are often seen as sending disproportionate numbers of African Americans to prison (Alexander, 2012, p. 113; Beckett, 2017; Small, 2001). A reversal of this policy under the Trump administration to reinstate the war on drugs reinvigorated a policy of racist and xenophobic practices (Beckett, 2017). Winslow (2017) argued that the Trump administration was trading policies that work (such as community policing and social programs) for ones that do not (mass arrests and incarceration).\textsuperscript{15}

These two actions, the reinvigoration of the War on Drugs and the Muslim Ban, by the Trump administration directly target people of Color. For this administration and its base, I believe that these communities are seen as outsiders to the administration’s vision of a White supremacist-cisheteropatriarchal order. This status of outsider may even be imagined, for such is the case with the Dreamers, the beneficiaries of DACA, for many of them may have no memory of ever being anywhere else but the United States. Many Dreamers arrived to the United States shortly after their birth. The actions of the

\textsuperscript{14} Holder was first appointed as Deputy Attorney General under the administration of Bill Clinton, and temporarily served under George W. Bust as acting Attorney General until a new appointee was confirmed. He was then brought back to the post by Barack Obama.

\textsuperscript{15} It is well-established that the initial call for the war on drugs was established as an us versus them-mentality, with suburban Whites establishing the war against urban communities of Color (Alexander, 2012, p. 105). The example of drug-influenced violence in Chicago by Trump and Attorney General Sessions and much-lauded by the right actually may be explained by the increase in violence just two years after a reduction in homicide detectives by 25 percent. This reduction in detectives came two years after a cut in funding for community policing and prevention programs further exacerbating conditions in the city (Winslow, 2017).
Trump administration perpetuated xenophobia and racism; people of Color, particularly non-Black people of Color, were and are routinely questioned about their legal status, and moreover, their patriotism. Trump enacted such racism during a closed-door meeting in January 2017 when he asked why the U.S. could not get refugees from such countries as “Norway”. Referencing Haiti and African nations, he asked, “Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?” (Emba, 2018). Rather than address the racism expressed in Trump’s degrading comment, Republicans denied what was said or quibbled over the word choice.

At a “Unite the Right” rally, organized by Jason Kessler of Unity & Security for America (Bertrand, 2017) that took place in Charlottesville, Virginia, on and near the campus of the University of Virginia, White supremacists and various other right-wing groups marched with tiki torches, chanting hateful rhetoric directed at people of Color and at people of Jewish descent. During the Unite the Right demonstrations, several people died, including Heather Heyer who was run down by a car by a White man from Ohio who had traveled to Virginia to attend the White supremacist gathering (Almasy & Narayan, 2017). For these White supremacist groups, violence is an explicit aim (Morlin, 2017). In response to the vehicular homicide of Heather Heyer and the greater Unite the Right Rally, Trump waited three days to address the role of the White supremacists. His denouncement included language that there were “some very fine people on both sides”

16 An act of resistance occurred several days later when activists projected the word “shithole” onto one of Trump’s hotel properties (Thomsen, 2018)
17 They argued that Trump, in fact, said shithouse, not shithole as was initially reported.
18 Groups in attendance included The Daily Stormer, The Right Stuff, The National Policy Institute, the Nationalist Front, League of the South, National Socialist Movement, The Ku Klux Klan, Identity Evropa. Individuals such as Richard Spencer and David Duke were also in attendance (McKenzie, 2017).
(Gray, 2017). The delay was monumental for a president renowned for his proximal and excessive tweets.

Trump was more responsive in his attack on National Football League (NFL) players taking a knee to protest police violence than about the death and violence that took place in Charlottesville (Boren, 2017). The delay is another example of the explicitly racialized decision making by the Trump Administration. Plainly put, he took three days to address the Charlottesville protest and did so with equivocation; in contrast, he came down much more quickly and with no uncertainty in his viewpoint of NFL players protesting police violence against members of communities of Color. This is an instance of explicitly defending Whiteness—the Charlottesville protesters\textsuperscript{19}—and attacking communities of Color (the NFL athletes protesting have been mostly men of Color).

In the fall of 2017, many hurricanes made landfall in the United States and nations within the Caribbean. One major one to hit the United States was Hurricane Harvey, which made landfall in Texas, devastating Houston (National Hurricane Center, 2018). Within weeks, Trump donated one million dollars to Hurricane Harvey relief (Pullen, 2017). In contrast, when Hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico, a U.S. protectorate, a month later, Trump's response was less than gracious. His response included an attack on the mayor of San Juan (Summers, 2017); he insinuated that Puerto Ricans “want everything done for them” (D. J. Trump, 2017b) and treated Puerto Ricans

\textsuperscript{19} Many of whom were carrying Trump/Pence signs (Thrush & Haberman, 2017)
as second-class citizens (Meléndez Olivera, 2017). Some reporters made comparisons to George W. Bush’s response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (H. Cooper, Davis, & Healy, 2017). In both of these instances, the majority of the citizenry (New Orleans and Puerto Rico) were people of Color. The different responses to Houston and Puerto Rico were a reminder that in the Trump administration, the president consistently sides with Whiteness, perhaps his greatest wealth from a man who made his life collecting wealth20.

I argue that through these Executive Orders and changes in policy, Trump marked the return of a straight, White supremacist, masculine, cis-gender, heterosexist? and nativist politics. It is clear that MAGA means a White America, a masculine America, a cisgender America, and a straight America. Further, beyond direct actions by Trump, his nominations have served as a reminder that we are no longer progressing toward more inclusion. We have returned to the public spectacle of White supremacy. A resurgence of White supremacy, now in the guise of the alt-right21, has found zealous followers in a community of disaffected White men (Chalabi, 2016), who seem to be feeling more comfortable with being public about their discriminatory actions (Hosking, 2017).

Today’s political climate is tumultuous. This tumult is particularly present on college

20 All of these moments during the Obama administration must not be confused as without nuance. For many of these moments are viewed as victories for marginalized populations, they are not without critique, especially from those they purport to help. Even withstanding these various critiques, the undermining of these signature achievements signifies a renewed attack on these groups that fall outside of the nostalgic whitestream norm of MAGA.

21 Short for alternative right, a loosely connected movement of conservatives, banded together through extreme right-wing views who reject mainstream conservatism in favor of explicit racism and White supremacy. This term originates with Richard Spencer of the National Policy Institute, a White supremacist think tank. Other terms used for this brand of conservatism are New Right and Dissident Right (Anti-Defamation League, 2017; Hosking, 2017).
camps where they have been targeted by virulent speakers such as Milo Yiannopoulos\textsuperscript{22} and Ben Shapiro\textsuperscript{23} (Friedersdorf, 2015; Healy, 2017).

**Significance of the Study**

Since the 1960s a proliferation of activism movements has occurred (Kauffmann, 2017). This particular study is important for activists and educators, because the research represented here offers a chance to better understand how young adults experience and practice social justice work when faced with the deployment of dominant narratives (Delgado, 2000) so unequivocally opposed to inclusion and equity (Lyotard, 1984). We are in a historical moment when speaking against the discourses perpetuated by the Trump administration has been framed by the right as “snowflake”, liberal elitism and morally questionable (Berlant, 2004). I believe that emotions play a significant role in activism and deserve attention. Paradoxically, the Trump administration has decried and devalued emotive anti- Trump responses by the public even as the same administration deployed emotive propaganda and discourse against by the very people they have decried and devalued.

As new media such as Twitter and Facebook are emergent, there is still room to understand how these tools are being used by millennial activists (Milkman, 2017). At the intersection of emotions and activism, more research needs to be produced (Gerbaudo, 2012; Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2001). When emotion and activism have

\textsuperscript{22} A British writer and speaker who was a provocateur of progressive college student movements, caused many protests on college campuses.

\textsuperscript{23} A conservative political commentator who caused a number of protests due to his views on college campuses between 2015 and 2017.
been studied, researchers examined macro impacts, for example, the ways that
governmentality of fear gives rise to an authoritarian mode of leadership (Moisi, 2009).
My aspiration is to better understand how a critical inquiry into the experiences of
emotions may provide a path of resistance and hope through our contemporary political
moment (Calhoun, 2001). Moreover, I hope this representation of research will provide
scholars of education, scholar-activists, university administrators, and student activists
with accounts of how young adults are navigating emotions during contentious times. I
direct my project specifically at these four groups, noting, of course, that in reality there
is overlap across the four for some individuals.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

As I am primarily concerned with the experiences of emotions and narratives
from marginalized, the participant artists were individuals who expressed non-
majoritarian political views. At this time, that would be anyone who does not identify as
a Republican, as the Republican Party controls both the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House
of Representatives, as well as the Executive Branch. To that end, while I have provided
context about the deployment of emotions/discourse by the Trump administration and its
espousal of dominant narratives (Delgado, 2000), I did not engage directly with
individuals who were a part of that deployment. This choice is also a limitation although
a purposeful one. Primarily, I am interested in the experiences of those who choose to
engage with liberatory efforts of inclusion, and so I did not engage in this iteration of
research with individuals whose views align with the actions of the Trump
administration.
It is hard, if not improbable, to exist in a vacuum devoid of the influence of a Western White hegemony. However, I am informed by decolonial thought as I work against myself and my privileges and as I engage in formal processes of research. Analogous to my decolonial commitments are my queer commitments. The queering of historically Western, White, and rational boundaries of knowledge (Jaggar, 1989; Warner, 1993), means researchers privilege the concerns and worldviews of the historically queer / non-normative, and interrogate the space and place for Western knowledges and how they can be both productive and oppressive. I am informed by queer theory in this project as well and hold a commitment to practicing recursive reflexivity (Pillow, 2003) in order to queer my own practice, process, and representations.

**Dissertation Layout**

Emotions cause us to act, as affect is the drive to act based on emotion (Spinoza, 1677/1992). To that end, in Chapter 2 I inform my audience of relevant literature on activism, activism within the academy, activism among young adults, new media and activism, emotions and affect, emotions and activism, and queer theory. In Chapter 3 I focus on the methodological approach to this study, which is informed by decolonial and queer commitments. Chapter 4 is a visual interlude, highlighting the zines created by the artists. Chapter 5 reflects the findings of the study, including the representation and discussion of 8 themes: the demands of artistry; building community; distance in families of birth; resistance to oppression; emotion; mental health, self-care, and guilt; the South; and social media. Finally, Chapter 6 contains a summary and a discussion with respect to theoretical and practical contexts to help develop future research and practice, with close
attention paid to my four primary audiences: scholars of education, scholar-activists, university administrators, and student activists.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE

In this chapter I explore the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that inform my argumentation and review the extant literature on my research topic. I address the ways activist-scholar identity and queer theory influence my topic and methodological choices. Then, I review theoretical engagements with emotions and affect and empirical studies on millennials' political engagement.

First, I examine the role of the activist-scholar. Then, I examine activism among young adults. Further, I engage in a historical examination of scholarship on emotions and affect and their intersection with contemporary activism and political engagement. I follow this by providing for theoretical contexts on affect and emotion. Then I explore the state deployment of fear and anxiety as a means of control before moving on to a review of hope as an emotion of resistance. Finally, I represent the layered ways queer theory informs my work.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Arts-based research (ABR) is an especially strong approach to scholarship “involving identity work” and to projects that “confront stereotypes that keep some groups disenfranchised” (Leavy, 2017, p. 10). ABR has the potential “to jar people into seeing and thinking differently” (Leavy, 2017, p. 10) and to challenge ideologies that uphold supremacist thinking. By engaging in artistic representation of the political body,
I intend in the name of justice to speak back to the power that functions upon my kin,\textsuperscript{24} exposing that power and subverting it.

\textbf{Activist-Scholar}

As an activist-scholar, I aim to explore power structures to understand how to erode oppressive social structures (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Drawing on work by Villenas (1996), I strive to explore and maintain the role of an activist-scholar and my commitment to targeted communities while working within an academy that privileges a particular formation of knowledge (Adsit, Doe, Allison, Maggio, & Maisto, 2015; Ahmed, 2012; Talburt, 2000). Like Villenas (1996), I have struggled to find my place as an activist-scholar. In my professional life, I have served as a university administrator. I was deeply troubled, as a queer, progressive individual, by the experience of working at an institution whose values were not in alignment with my own (Weiser & Wagner, 2017). My experiences of marginalization have served to forge my own activist and scholar identities and my activist-scholar agenda, but I strive in my work to consider all communities that face marginalization—not just my own. This commitment likely comes, too, from my decade of work in a multicultural center at a southern, conservative, predominantly White institution (which I will call SCPWI).\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{24} A term often used in reference to queer and trans community solidarity (Nicolazzo, 2017).

\textsuperscript{25} While I may define and think of this university as a conservative institution, it is a flagship university in the capital city of a southern state, and due to the presence of the university, the surrounding area is far more politically liberal than the more rural areas. This may be the most liberal space that some of SCPWI's students have ever stepped into. On the other hand, some students have expressed that they feel stifled by the conservative nature of the school. As with many things, “conservatism” is relative.
Through my work and in my advocacy for justice and inclusion, often I faced resistance that had real and embodied impact on my own experiences (Weiser, Wagner, & Lawter, in press). I have never been one to settle for small victories, or to stop and rest once some progress has been made. This is for three primary reasons. First, I was working at SCPWI when Barack Obama won the presidential election in 2008. And while I was excited and happy to witness such a historic event, subsequently my work in a university multicultural center became more complex and nuanced. I was tasked with facilitating racial reconciliation dialogues on campus, due to the rise of White racism and White-racial backlash both on campus as well as larger cultural shifts. That work was a part of my awakening to White-racial backlash to the election of the first person of Color to the presidency. I became aware that despite how excited I and many of the students I worked with felt, we had all been tasked with attending to the White fragility made manifest through this historic event.

The second reason I do not settle for just some progress toward justice and inclusion is an experience I had helping the LGBT student organization at SCPWI host a National Coming Out Day event and seeing a student crying tears of rage at the fact that “her” university would allow such a celebration. This was the same semester that SCPWI had hired its first-ever full-time employee dedicated to serving LGBT students. Her tears signaled to me that while SCPWI was officially hosting the event, some of the students still were emotionally opposed to it.

The third reason is I have always questioned whether I could do more to bring about justice and inclusion: In the past, I have witnessed, challenged, and been complicit
with upper level administrators, fellow entry-level support staff, and students who questioned how far and how hard we should push. These challenges came from professionals in the division of student affairs, too. Some have shared: “[It] may not be great for students of Color, but look how far we’ve come”, or “We could never have gender-inclusive housing; this is a conservative school.” These statements, along with “We can’t buck tradition because some students are upset; this is the way it’s always been,” have served to continuously disenfranchise and stop student activist movements. Administrators are apt to wait out students, knowing full well that students graduate and that “troublemakers” leave (Randall, 2017). I have heard voicemails that upper level administrators have left on student activists’ cellphones—sometimes intentionally, sometimes by accident after they believed they had hung up—calling these students “uppity.” For these reasons, I never slow down after one victory is achieved. I am always suspicious of progress narratives, which in my experience serve to usurp radical movements’ momentum.

I believe that participating in social movements is not a balm to being complicit in systems of oppression, but that participation is a step toward challenging White cisheteropatriarchal hegemonies. Likewise, individuals who challenge hegemonic power may be complicit still in some areas of oppression. I believe we are all works in progress. Activist-scholars in the academy run the risk of taking on the disturbing features of the

26 The [It] here can be a stand-in for so many actions taken by university administrators. Some examples: limiting funding for identity-based offices, failing to challenge hate speech on campus, refusing to examine the relationship between predominantly White Greek fraternities and sororities and homecoming, the failing to support historically marginalized students who are faced with oppressive actions by faculty or staff.
very structures we hope to dismantle (Sandoval, 2000). Queer theorists encourage me to never rest on my laurels but rather to continuously push to create a more just and equitable space through nonstop critique.

I believe good theory “tells us a story—in nonordinary language (which jolts us out of our complacency and into attention)—of how things are and helps us discover the possibilities of how things might be” (Butler, 1997, p. 144). I attempt to theorize the data the artists and I have generated together.

**Activism**

An activist is one who brings about activism; activism is the “active participation or engagement in a particular sphere of activity; spec. the use of vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change” (“activism, n.,” 2010). It is this specialized version of the word, denoting vigorous campaigning, that I call upon in my deployment of the term *activism*.

**Activism and the Academy**

The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives an interesting definition of *academic* as “not leading to a decision; unpractical; strictly theoretical or formal. Now also in weakened sense: of no consequence, irrelevant” (“academic, n. and adj.,” 2011). This definition runs in the opposite direction of the preceding definition of an activist. One reflects a person of action; the other reflects a person of inaction, a thinker rather than a doer.

Adsit, Doe, Allison, Maggio, and Maistro (2015) addressed the precariousness, or the economic vulnerability (Puar, 2012) of particular lines of inquiry in higher education.
They analyzed various programs to discover that academic and student affairs
departments that trafficked in “identity politics suffer[ed] funding cuts and closures,
while science and technology programs [were] spared” (Adsit et al., 2015, p. 21).
Programs that acknowledge identity politics are considered a financial drain on the
institution, rather than possible sources of revenue. While fairness is the goal, the reality
is that “precarity is unevenly distributed in today’s corporate university” (Adsit et al.,
2015, p. 21), because the programs in danger are the ones that are not seen as financially
sustainable.

Adsit et al. (2015) addressed how emotionality plays a significant role in precarity
as well. They found that academic laborers who express and challenge the “emotional
hegemony that serves to maintain the status quo in naturalized power relations” (Adsit et
al., 2015, p. 33) often find themselves part of the precariat. Departments that engage in
“consciousness-raising as an explicit commitment are disproportionately affected by
institutional cuts” (Adsit et al., 2015, p. 25). The corporatization of higher education
continually undervalues certain forms of knowledge production, often in fields more
populated by those who have been historically marginalized (Adsit et al., 2015) and,
those who are more inclined to engage in social justice and consciousness-raising
activities.

Tessema (2015) used narrative inquiry in his dissertation to explore the ways in
which Ethiopian higher education activists have engaged in their work despite the state’s
repressive tactics. He explored the work of nine former students who engaged in ethnic
identity–based activism at three Ethiopian universities between 1997 and 2007. He found
that where activism developed, the state eventually took counteractions in order to repress the activists. So, while the study did not concern itself with undergraduate students in a U.S. context, it underscores how activists across the world face repressive actions by the state.

Building on Tessema (2015), Webb (2017) explored student activism through qualitative interviews in the Trump era at the University of Tennessee. Primarily leaning on Grzanka, Blazer, and Adler’s (2015) framework of “identity choreography,” Webb (2017) argued that three themes bound contemporary college-aged activists together: social networks, identities, and resistance. Using identity choreography—descriptions of various knowledges and experiences that are used to constitute identities and the identities of others (Grzanka et al., 2015)—Webb (2017) explored how contemporary student activists used social media as a place for meaning-making and coalition-building. Webb determined that social network space is important to activist identity and resistance, a finding that echoes the research of other scholars (Bailey, 2017; Cabrera, Matias, & Montoya, 2017; Carney, 2016; Gerbaudo, 2012). Webb asserted that through social networks and motivation from resistance, student activists were “able to fight against these systems of oppression, find community even in places where it feels like their community is trying to be erased, and generally improve the lives of not only themselves but others to come” (2017, p. 38).

This project has the potential to challenge the way that some people (Whites, heterosexuals, males, the upper class, etc.) may see young adult activists with whom they may not share any overlapping aspects of identity. The audiences I write this for are
multiple, including the aforementioned people who hold privilege. Like other activist-scholars, I work in community with the individuals in my project, and I tread carefully so as to not misrepresent them. Further, I am careful to hold my own activist commitments knowing that activist-scholars are often challenged by other activists.

Activist-scholars may face backlash from community members who feel activist-scholars are not real activists (G. Brown & Pickerill, 2009). This misplacement of activist-scholars, relegated by “real” activists to the border between grassroots activists and academics, can cause conflicts within both communities (G. Brown & Pickerill, 2009; Chatterton, 2008). There are several different aspects of backlash facing activist-scholars. First, the academy in the United States is part of a Eurocentric system that privileges particular knowledges, and activists (including of the scholarly variety) question whether activist-scholars can work from within this system. Second, while some scholars may be part of the community they work with, there still may be divides along differences of identity inside and outside the academy. The activist-scholar might not share the everyday experiences and identities of the community. This is an illustration of the intersection of identity and politics. Third, those of us who straddle the border between two or more communities are often told to focus on one over another. In some communities, including in academia, I have been told to forget where I come from, namely my working-class background (Ardoin, 2013). At the same time, those of us who

27 U.S. institutions of higher education were built using slave labor, a pillar of White supremacist organizations (A. Smith, 2016; Wilder, 2014). These institutions have benefited directly from White supremacy and, I argue, have not yet contended with this troubled history.
are new to a community often are no longer welcomed in our home communities, and our new community is foreign; we do not quite speak the language (Ardoin, 2013). When scholars first enter academia, we are thrown headfirst into a new community and new way of speaking. This immersion may be intended to help us orient quickly to the academy, rather than to pigeonhole us (Delgado, 1984). But I see this help as an act of hegemony, of benevolent oppression, coercing newcomers to conform to the expected performance of an academic.

Depending on the institution, the discipline, and the faculty, that performance often still demands apolitical, neutral, and rational research (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991; Jaggar, 1989). Activist research “helps us better to understand the root causes of inequality, oppression, violence and related conditions of human suffering” (Hale, 2001, p. 13). Importantly, activist research is pursued in “direct cooperation with an organized collective of people who themselves are subject to these conditions” (Hale, 2001, p. 13). While activism-based research and an activist agenda may constitute only part of an academic’s research arc, I believe that when someone engages in activism, engagement colors all aspects of their life, as it becomes part of their positionality and their embedded situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988).

In activist research, researchers must focus on the needs of the community and not merely on what is trendy or useful for our own research portfolio (Nagar, 2002). By focusing only on what makes sense for one’s career, researchers fall into the trap of being too far removed from a community we opt to call our own—for instance, when an academic researches sensitive populations without a full understanding of the
implications of the research and the academic’s relationships with the community. This kind of research can end up doing more harm than good (Call-Cummings & Martinez, 2016). Communities need to be able to choose with whom they want to engage. It is an honor to do activist informed research, one that ought not to be wasted on disingenuous and/or self-interested research projects in which we pop in and out of the community when it is useful or convenient (Cahill, 2007; Rahman, 1991).

**Activism Among Young Adults**

Activism has long been a part of the student experience on college campuses; it is as “American as apple pie” (Ellsworth & Burns, 1970, p. 5). This is true of both historically Black colleges and universities and predominantly White institutions (PWIs) (R. Cohen & Snyder, 2013; Ellsworth & Burns, 1970; Thelin, 2011). From the “Great Butter Rebellion” in the 18th century at Harvard to the rise of activism on college campuses in the 1960s, students have used their voices to advocate for their needs and beliefs (Ellsworth & Burns, 1970; Thelin, 2011). Black and White student activists rose to prominence during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. For instance, some of the civil rights leadership during this era came out of the work of Black high school and college students, such as through the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Freedom Rides, and the Greensboro sit-ins (Astin, Astin, Bayer, & Bisconti, 1975; Carson, 1995).

**Historical Student Activism in the United States**

The activism of millennials “synthesizes the identity politics of the New Left of the 1960s and the traditional critiques of class inequality and capitalism associated with
the Old Left of the 1930s” (Milkman, 2017, p. 25) to create a new movement cohered through sensations, emotions, and feelings. Milkman (2017) argued that just as historical movements built upon one another, taking from and breaking with movements that came before and remaking activism as they saw fit, today’s activism is built on the foundation of yesterday’s. To describe the activism of today, I start by situating activism by young adults and students in the context of the United States since the 1960s.


The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) arose out of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) when Ella Baker, then director of SCLC, became concerned that SCLC was out of touch with younger people (Carson, 1995). She reached out to Black college students at Shaw University who had participated in sit-ins to encourage them to organize their own group, which would become SNCC. This outreach set the stage for more participation from young Black Americans or African Americans to have a voice in the civil rights movement (King Institute, n.d.).

As a student at Howard University, Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) became involved with SNCC and participated in its freedom rides of 1961 under the leadership of Diane Nash, a leader of the student wing of the civil rights movement (Carmichael & Thelwell, 2003). Carmichael eventually became a leader of SNCC, which had a role in many other 1960s civil rights events, such as the 1963 March on Washington, Freedom Summer, and the Selma campaign (Carmichael & Thelwell, 2003; Sargent, 2004). SNCC and Carmichael were eventually targeted by the FBI’s COINTELPRO, and SNCC was
identified as a Black radical organization (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1967), which contributed to the group’s demise.

There were some intergenerational divides and tensions between the older membership of SCLC and the younger activists framed by some in SCLC as “upstarts” (Carson, 1995). Relationships between SNCC and the “big five” organizations of the civil rights movement (Congress for Racial Equality [CORE], the NAACP, NAACP Legal Defense Fund, SCLC, and the Urban League) were often fraught, because SNCC had developed as an antithesis to these other groups (Forman, 1972). SNCC was people- and community-centered, rather than leader-centered like many of the big five (Forman, 1972). While other organizations sought acceptance from mainstream political movements, SNCC stood in opposition to both major political parties, because it believed that these parties were not doing enough for civil rights (Forman, 1972).

SNCC, composed in the 1960s largely of younger Black and African American people, organized voter registration among communities of Color as seen in the Mississippi Freedom Summer. Moreover, SNCC had a role in the execution of the Selma campaigns and in the March Against Fear. In each of these actions, SNCC advocated for civil liberties, with the larger purpose of helping Black and African American people exercise their right to vote. SNCC also had a role in the planning of the 1963 March on Washington, also referred to as the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, which was instrumental in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Picard, 2013). After the Watts riots in 1965, SNCC sought to break ties with what it saw as assimilationist arms of the civil rights movement. This turning point came
when Stokley Carmichael took over as chair of SNCC and advocated for Black Power (Carmichael & Thelwell, 2003).

Beyond SNCC, other moments of activism have also been youth-led or had large student components. The Black Panther Party (BPP) was formed in 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, both African American students at Merritt College in Oakland, California. The BPP was developed in response to police brutality against Black citizens in California. Members of the BPP would patrol with loaded guns, following police to ensure they would not abuse their power over Black citizens. Contemporary activists filming incidents of excessive force and brutality, perpetrated by the police against African Americans and other/queered populations is a contemporaneous example of similar surveillance.

The BPP from its inception was seen as subversive and was put under surveillance by COINTELPRO. In 1969, Then-FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover declared that “the BPP, without question, represents the greatest threat to internal security of the country” (Luna Ray Films, 2002, p. n.p.). The BPP resisted White supremacy to work toward equality in four primary areas: education, housing, employment, and civil rights (Bloom & Martin, 2016). These primary aims were further detailed in the original Ten-Point Plan of the BPP.

28 Interestingly, this moment of activism helped spur a new wave of right-wing support for gun rights (Krulwich & Abumrad, 2018).
The BPP was far more militant in its image than the preceding movements, including SCLC and SNCC. It was this image of militancy that scared a lot of White people during this time (Luna Ray Films, 2002). One of the programs that caused a stir among White people in power was the free breakfast program for children. By the summer of 1989, the BPP was feeding upwards of 10,000 children every day (Bloom et al., 2016). This served to give “members meaningful daily activities, strengthen black community support, burnish Party credibility in the eyes of allies, and vividly expose the inadequacy of the federal government’s concurrent War on Poverty” (Bloom et al., 2016, p. 13). By serving their own community, the Black Panthers resisted and subverted the supremacy of the federal government. Many of the members of the Black Panther Party were young at the founding of the organization. Huey Newton and Bobby Seale met while college students, and many of the individuals attracted to the organization were young (Bloom, et al., 2016).

1970s: Gay Liberation Front and anti-war protests.

A student at Columbia University formed an organization called the Student Homophile League (SHL) in the fall of 1965 (Beemyn, 2003). After police raid at the Stonewall Inn in New York City in 1969 the members of the SHL engaged with colleagues in the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) to form the Gay Liberation Front (GLF). GLF was formed and shaped by SDS. Allen Young, a young White journalist, activist, and member of SDS, was key in framing the principles of GLF (Kissack, 1995). The GLF drew on principles and rhetoric of radical movements of the 1960s and sought to transform all of society. This aim appealed to many students, and shortly after the organization’s founding, students from colleges began to get involved.
(Beemyn, 2003). GLF formed a sub-group, Gay Youth (GY) that organized chapters nationwide (S. Cohen, 2005). GLF sought to abolish oppressive institutions that maintained gender roles, with an emphasis on schools (Cohen, 2005). These young activists helped create homes for LGBTQ students in college student services organizations, as well as within academic affairs divisions, during the 1960s and 1970s (R. Cohen & Snyder, 2013; Toy, 2011).

Youth-led resistance to the Vietnam War of the 1960s is well-documented, with clashes on college campuses between student protestors and ROTC students, burning of draft cards, and protesting of career fairs that featured companies supporting the war effort (D. L. Anderson & Ernst, 2014). The resistance to the Vietnam War was further bolstered by support from radical left organizations such as the Black Panthers, GLF, and women’s liberation groups. A generation later, the children of 1960s anti-war student protesters took to protesting the Persian Gulf War (Duncan, Drew, Hodgson, & Sawyer, 2009).

The 1990s.

According to Rhoads (2000), after the civil rights era, protests on college campuses were scant for many years. Beginning again in the 1990s, student protest and activism centered on localized issues of identity, with attention to marginalized groups. Rhodes (2000) argued that the rise of student activism in the early 1990s was a response to the “force of conservatism” in the 1980s “that created an environment in which progressive-minded students saw little choice but to join arms to launch a countermovement” (Rhoads, 2000, p. 220). Rhodes studied activism on several different
college campuses including University of California, Los Angeles; Michigan State University; Rutgers University; Mills College; and Pennsylvania State University. Groups on each campus protested regarding issues of identity and representation, elevated their concerns, and changed institutional policies. Rhodes’s accounts highlight struggles for inclusion and representation of Chicano, Black and African American, LGBT, and women’s issues in higher education.

Much like Rhodes (2000), I am interested in political activism among young adults. I turn my gaze almost 30 years later to how the wave of conservatism that began with the Tea Party\textsuperscript{29} and has come to a crest with the election of President Trump.

\textit{Activism since 9/11.}

In September 2001, the United States faced one of the worst terrorist attacks that had ever occurred in the country’s history. Nearly a month later, the U.S. Congress passed a reactionary piece of legislation known as the USA Patriot Act, which authorized increased surveillance and intelligence collection in the name of protecting Americans. In reality, this piece of legislation did as much to “chip away at the constitutionally protected rights of citizens and residents of the United States” as it did to protect their safety (Evans, 2001, p. 934). This act, since its inception in 2001, has caused a great deal of protest, which continues with each renewal.

\textsuperscript{29} A conservative movement that calls for the reduction of the national debt and lower taxes and increasing immigration controls. The founders were backed initially by the Koch brothers (Ray, 2018).
Even the name itself, the Patriot Act, signified that anyone who opposed such an act must be anti-patriotic—a verbal coup against the act’s detractors (Ahmed, 2004; Berlant, 2004; Puar & Rai, 2002). Resistance to the act was difficult to muster in an era when patriotism in the United States became synonymous with nationalism. For instance, during this time, due to French opposition to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the U.S. House of Representatives stopped serving french fries (a non-French dish) and started serving “freedom fries” (Silver, 2011).

Following the passage of the Patriot Act, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a lawsuit against the new legislation, citing the targeting of American citizens and the intent to target racial, religious, and political minorities (ACLU, 2003b). Muslim students in part led a charge in protesting the Patriot Act, as they were primary targets of the new legislation (Vanzi, 2004). Sikhs were also mistakenly targeted, being mistaken for Muslims (Puar, 2007). The Patriot Act helped construct those of Middle East descent as “non-Americans” (Brazeal, 2004). Scarily, protest of the bill itself could be construed as an act of terrorism (ACLU, 2003a).

Students spoke up to plead with Congress and President George W. Bush to consider the impact of this legislation on Americans (Arrine & Kan, 2004). Colleges and universities were sites of action in protest of the Patriot Act (Vasi & Strang, 2009) and students worked to pass “bill of rights” resolutions in opposition to the Patriot Act. This movement was effective in its diversity of tactics, and it unfolded across varied spaces. For example, shared opposition to the Patriot Act brought together people from different ideological backgrounds—such as the Stonewall Democrats (a network of LGBT groups)
and the Eagle Forum (a group formed by the notoriously anti-LGBT Phyllis Schlafly)—but also people from different regional contexts, such as activists in Texas and Massachusetts. Not only were students taking the lead, but a multifaceted movement of religious organizations, national organizations like the ACLU, and local progressive organizations also helped lead resistance to the Patriot Act (Vasi & Strang, 2009).

With later iterations of the Patriot Act, protest and resistance continued. Famously, the online activist group Fight for the Future gave web code to more than 10,000 websites that redirected any visitor with an IP address from within Congress to a protest website that read “Congress: This is a blackout. We are blocking your access until you end mass surveillance laws.” (“Congress keeps trying to break the Internet. Let’s break theirs instead.”, n.d.; Hattem, 2015).

Students also played a part in the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement, which began in September 2011 in Zuccotti Park in New York City to protest income inequality. This protest lasted until November 15, 2011, at which time protestors were forced from the park (Barron & Moynihan, 2011). The Occupy Wall Street direct action campaign that literally occupied Zuccotti Park provided many millennials with their first opportunity for direct political engagement (Kauffman, 2017). For months prior to the actual occupation of spaces by OWS, activists took to Twitter, inspired by activists in the Arab Spring movement (Gerbaudo, 2012; Tremayne, 2014).

Tremayne (2014) argued that Twitter helped create a community that could communicate direct action across time and space. Using an archive of tweets, Tremayne (2014) analyzed the spread of the movement via the hashtags #OccupyWallStreet and
#OccupyWallSt. He used the PeopleBrowsr archive, because Twitter itself would only deliver 1,500 results. Tremayne (2014) tracked the genesis of the OWS movement to a blog post from Adbusters (Culture Jammers HQ, 2011).

DeLuca, Lawson, and Sun (2012) argued that OWS was laughed at by older generations and on old media formats, but was celebrated among younger people and on new media. DeLuca et al. (2012) argued that students and young people took part in OWS primarily because of the crushing student loan debt they faced. Right-leaning bloggers took this to mean the movement had no basis and was meaningless; they characterized these students as having “proved themselves to be a drain on society and thus unworthy of having a voice” (DeLuca et al., 2012, p. 494). On the other end of the spectrum, left-leaning bloggers saw the fact that the movement was made up of students and homeless people as evidence of the veracity of OWS’s claims regarding income inequality. The reality is that while the average age was about 33, this was in truth a balance of students, recent graduates, as well as older-mid career individuals (Goodale, 2011). The movement began to occupy many spaces across the country, including many college campuses, such as the University of California, Davis, where one of the more famous images of the movement came about when John Pike, a White police lieutenant, pepper-sprayed a multiracial group of student protesters (DeLuca et al., 2012).

The OWS of St. Louis, known as Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment, worked with the Organization for Black Struggle and local protestors after Darren Wilson, a White police officer, killed Mike Brown, an unarmed African American man, in Ferguson, Missouri (Kauffman, 2017). Mike Brown’s parents, in
conjunction with these organizations and Hands Up United, delivered a letter to the United Nations Committee Against Torture stating that their son’s death and the response by the Ferguson police department violated the conventions of the United Nations (Bever, 2014).

While the Occupy movement was largely White-led, it gave money and support to the newly burgeoning Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Although BLM was never part of the strategic core of the OWS movement, it was “very clear that this was a movement for black self-determination,” and “not a wide-open political space to be flooded and overwhelmed by well-meaning white people” (Kauffman, 2017, p. 180).

BLM is intentional about modeling itself after the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the 1960s organization that helped African Americans gain access to public spaces and the right to vote (F. C. Harris, 2015). Of particular importance for Black Lives Matter and Occupy Wall Street is the group-centered model of leadership (Gitlin, 2012; F. C. Harris, 2015), which was important for many of the civil rights organizations of the 1960s (F. C. Harris, 2015; Kauffman, 2017). The youth-led element and the autonomous and diffused leadership structures lend themselves to comparisons between this new moment of activism and the historical action of the 1960s. It was this group-centered model that I had hoped would emerge in the art sessions. While I modeled this behavior, some individuals spoke up more than others, rather than a true diffused style of conversation.

Bailey (2017) found that for Black millennials, activism and social media use had a positive correlation. She also argued that there was a division between older and
younger millennials, with millennials under age 25 more averse to Facebook than their older counterparts were. She reported that Black millennials outpaced their White counterparts “as catalysts of change using technology and social media” (Bailey, 2017, p. 54).

The past several years have seen many movements on college campuses protest racial bias (Holdship, 2014); bring attention to sexism and sexual assault (Dick, 2016; Saul & Taylor, 2017); advocate for immigration rights (Blitzer, 2017; Powers, 2006); call for a boycott of Israel, divestment, and sanctions (Alterman, 2016); and arguably to make more and more intersectional demands, with protest groups at more than 80 U.S. universities delivering lists of demands to their respective administrations in the Fall of 2015 (Randall, 2017; WeTheProtesters, 2015). When today’s youth and college students are written about, they are mostly framed as apathetic (Stein, 2013). This representation aligns with the branding of millennials30 as selfish and lazy (Milkman, 2017; Seelig, 2018; Stein, 2013) and that this characterization is unfair and untrue. The reality is that many of today’s youth are engaged and have powerful voices in creating change, just as youth have throughout history (Bailey, 2017; Costanza-Chock, 2012; Milkman, 2017; Seelig, 2018). Reports show a tendency toward progressive values among millennials, more so than among their parents—but the tendency is even stronger among millennials’ successors, Generation Z (McElwee, 2016; Tsjeng, 2016; Yougov, 2016). As such, these

voters who trend more progressive (millennials, people of Color, lower income), have seen their rights to vote systematically disenfranchised (McElwee, 2015).

Therefore, those who might be engaged in the political process to create progressive change have been disincentivized to do so through systematic disenfranchisement. But many millennials have overcome these barriers and the stereotypes leveled at them and become engaged politically. Today’s students use the tried-and-true methods of the past, such as walk-outs, petitions, and occupation of space (M. D. Anderson, 2015), often to frame intersectional lists of demands for inclusive policies and resources on college campuses (Randall, 2017). Although some scholars believe that these students are trying to make their institutions more inclusive, others believe today’s student activists are fragile and entitled and that the duty of a college campus is to tell them they need to grow up (Grewal, 2015; Kirchick, 2015). In my experience working with marginalized college students, I rarely found them to be in need of growing up. Often, many of them could have used a few more years of childhood—years they were robbed of due to regimes of normative discourses, discrimination, and violence.

In much of the recent literature, the proliferation of new media such as Twitter and Facebook has been central to the organizing structures of contemporary activisms (Bailey, 2017; Cabrera et al., 2017; Carney, 2016; Gerbaudo, 2012; Hattem, 2015; Hope, Keels, & Durkee, 2016; Idle & Nunns, 2011; Lapowsky, 2017; Lopez, 2014; J. A. Muñoz & Culton, 2016; Seelig, 2018; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013; Tremayne, 2014). By extension, I believe that social media must be central to the organizing structures
millennials use for activism. It is imperative, however, to acknowledge that not all have consistent access to social media platforms. To have consistent access means persistent access to the internet through a smartphone, something that low-income individuals may not have access to.

**New Media and Activism**

Due in part to the heightened visibility of protest via social media, *Time* magazine declared 2011 the year of the activist (“Person of the Year 2011 - TIME,” 2011). Shirky (2009) argued that social media, a form of new media, serves as a powerful new tool to create new methods of group formation, better and faster. The costs associated with organizing (time, space, location) were lowered, allowing movements to build much faster. This enabled moments such as the Arab Spring not only to occur but to reach a much greater audience, enabling and serving as a spark for a new global activism.

Various forms of social media were used in an assemblage to serve different ends. Facebook was used to finalize dates; Twitter, for logistics; YouTube, for visual coverage and to share the experiences; all of them were used to connect people (Gerbaudo, 2012). These new media create new ways of transmitting affect through the sharing of experiences and moments.

It is through the proliferation of new media that these new activisms formulate as autonomous, leaderless, and horizontal (Penny, 2011; Wilkinson, 2009). New media allow for greater interconnectivity, with a focus on the end user’s created content. It was only a matter of time before these platforms were used to create content that defied expectations of the platform and to challenge norms. It is this expression of self-mass
communication (Castells, 2011), in which these end users broadcast their expressions to large audiences, they realize “the promise of autonomy from bureaucratic structures and increasing scope for political and social engagement from below” (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 22). These new media allow for this horizontal and decentralized notion of community. One can become a follower of a movement with the click of a button.

Tarrow (2011) explained that cyclical rise and fall of activist movements as having five stages, which he named the cycle of contention. The rise of new media, has engendered greater political engagement and a shorter cycle of contention (Tarrow, 2011). No longer are only the students at UC Berkeley hearing the passionate speech from Mario Savio—31—we are hearing from Alicia Garza,32 Feminista Jones,33 and Jazz Jennings34 on a regular basis on Twitter. Twitter has given individuals greater access to others who are sharing their stories of activism. This sharing, engenders the potential for greater mobilization than in times past. This is due to two factors. First, individuals see that they are not alone. They see that resistance to the status quo is not an individual

31 An activist with the Free Speech Movement at Berkley who famously stated that “there’s a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious—makes you so sick at heart—that you can’t take part. You can’t even passively take part. And you’ve got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you’ve got to make it stop. And you’ve got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you’re free, the machine will be prevented from working at all” (Savio, 1964).
32 One of the three founders of the Black Lives Matter movement, a “Black-centered political will and movement building project … in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s murderer, George Zimmerman” (“Herstory,” 2018).
33 A popular blogger and social worker. Self-described as an “in-demand feminist writer, public speaker, and community activist currently residing in Philadelphia” … “her work centers on Black American culture, critical race theory, intersectionality, women’s health and well-being (specifically in areas of mental and sexual health)” (Jones, 2018).
34 A young trans woman who appeared on 20/20 with Barbara Walters at only seven years old and is a prominent figure for trans youth. She is a cofounder of TransKids Purple Rainbow Foundation, which assists trans youth (“TransKids Purple Rainbow Foundation,” 2015).
activity. Second, they see that many others are in the cycle of contention (Tarrow, 2011), experiencing discontentment. This might encourage individuals to speak out. No longer is it a small group of young people with wristbands protesting in their school, as in *Tinker v. Des Moines*, but rather thousands of people showing up for a march or a protest (*Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, 393 U.S. 503, 1969*). The size and scope of these movements have been greatly altered with the advent of new media, as well. This has been documented with such movements as the Women’s March after the inauguration of Donald Trump (Lapowsky, 2017), the Arab Spring (Gerbaudo, 2012; Idle & Nunns, 2011), Black Lives Matter (Carney, 2016), and Occupy Wall Street (DeLuca et al., 2012).

**Emotions and Affect**

Activist-informed research must take the emotions of participants seriously, addressing the impact that emotions may have on their lives (Askins, 2009). While scholars may have an ethic of beneficence, we also may inadvertently “allow oppressive status quo relationships to persist, even to further entrench within institutions” (Call-Cummings & Martinez, 2016, p. 808). By engaging with research that is not intentional with its use of emotion, we may cause unintended consequences that bring about more harm than good.

Further, the study and centering of emotions need to be taken up with care. A simple “Emotions matter!” is not what is needed, but a critical inquiry into the realities of emotions, the way they weave themselves into every crevice of our lives is what is needed (Calhoun, 2001). Activist-scholars must continuously question the false
dichotomy of politics or emotion and engage with the queer politics of emotion (Ahmed, 2014). Scholars must treat emotion as central to our understanding of the lifeworlds of those with whom we are in community, but also to our understanding of our own emotions. Activists should not just be allies in the quest to privilege previously ignored and unacknowledged emotions—we should also be companions on this journey. Activist-scholars must be willing to risk when risk needs to be taken. We must “challenge lazy, overpaid professors, connect with inspiring movements for change, and turn [our] work places into spaces of joy, hope and rebellion!” (Chatterton, 2008, p. 426).

Prior to the 1960s, social scientists believed emotions were critical to understanding political movements and protest (Goodwin et al., 2001); in the past 50 years, this belief has changed. During the 1960s, protest was seen as irrational, a kind of acting out and a sign of immaturity (Goodwin et al., 2001; Wolf-Wendel, 2004). One consequence was that emotionality, seen as largely subversive, was relegated to a position outside the rational project of knowledge production in the academy, except in particular schools of thought such as neo-Marxism or feminism (Jaggar, 1989; Lyotard, 1984).

Goodwin et al. (2001) argued that some contemporary social scientists were studying again the centrality of emotion to politics, that “emotions, properly understood, may prove once again to be a central concern of political analysis” (p. 2). While not all scholars may engage with the centrality of emotions, that researchers who care about the creation of a more just, inclusive, loving, and celebratory future “must adopt strategies of
affirmative, reconstructive collective social action” (Johnston, 2004, p. 71). To be productive, such strategies need to include a robust understanding of emotion.

Massumi (2002, 2015), a contemporary social theorist and philosopher, believed that the transmission of affect existed as a reciprocal project between people—a project of hope and of potential—and that there was a distinct difference between emotions and affects. For Massumi, the act of affecting and the act of being affected were experiences related to intensity. Intensity marked the difference between affect and emotions. For Massumi, emotions could not “encompass all the depth and breadth of our experiencing of experiencing” (Massumi, 2003, p. n.p.). Massumi understood emotions to be the “expression of affect in gesture and language, its conventional or coded expression” (Massumi, 2003, p. n.p.). Massumi used affect in a Spinozan fashion (Spinoza was a philosopher from the 17th century), framing ways that affects connected individuals to each other and to situations. This Spinozan connectedness is central to my understanding of the manifestation of emotions and affects in this project.

Ahmed (2014), a contemporary scholar who works at the intersection of feminist, queer, and race studies, believed that emotions bind groups together, existing as a shared experience and as a marker of humanity. She critiqued Massumi’s (2002) conceptualization of affect and emotion as distinct and positioned against one another. Massumi contended that affects were pre-personal and nonintentional, and emotions personal and intentional. This distinction, Ahmed (2014) argued—and I agree—operated as a gendered distinction. As such, emotions as embodied experiences, as expressions of affect, reified the mind/body and masculine/feminine dyads.
Ahmed argued that these distinctions not only were destructive to the feminist project, which privileged embodied knowledges, but also created a distinction where none was needed. This distinction did a disservice to the understanding of emotions as central to activism and, I contend, was a way for White masculine individuals to talk about emotions without ceding their masculinity. This is evident to me in the deployment of the term *affect* largely by men, and in the fact that those engaging in research surrounding *emotion* are mostly women, queer, of color, or from other historically disenfranchised groups (Ahmed, 2004, 2010, 2014; Massumi, 2002, 2003; Thien, 2005). This distinction between affect and emotion serves as another way for White masculinity to circumvent the presumed ceding of power. For these reasons, I dismiss the idea that there is any meaningful difference between affect and emotions, and I engage in understanding emotions as means of connection between people and situations. Emotions are often seen as unscientific and “subversive of knowledge” (Jaggar, 1989, p. 151), set in opposition to rationality. According to Ahmed (2014), emotions are embodied, experienced through physiological and mental manifestations.

In the next section, I explain both affects (S. D. Brown & Stenner, 2001; Massumi, 2002, 2003, 2015; Spinoza, 1677/1992) and emotions (Ahmed, 2004, 2010, 2014), their convergences and divergences, and how and why I, along with Ahmed (2014) and Thien (2005), disregard lines of argumentation about differences between them. Further, I explore how emotions can be framed both as feelings and as discourse (S. D. Brown & Stenner, 2001; Cvetkovich, 2003; Edwards, 1999; Loseke, 2009). Additionally, I address Jaggar’s (1989) argument that some emotions have been pushed to the periphery and ignored. Finally, I argue that if one presumes that in discourse
“power and knowledge are joined together” (Foucault, 1978, p. 100), emotions can be leveraged for power.

**Affect or Emotions: Historical Tensions**

Affect is the driving force behind action. Spinoza (1992) argued that the body has the capacity for affecting or being affected. Spinoza asserted that affect is the source of action. The idea of conatus comes from Spinoza’s work, and he defined conatus as a material drive for self-preservation. For Spinoza, affect was the conatus of action, and action arose from adequate ideas, whereas a lack of action reflected inadequate ideas (Spinoza, 1992). Adequate ideas were ideas understood as distinct from inadequate ideas, and with known causes and intrinsic origins. An inadequate idea was simply a partial adequate idea. For Spinoza, adequate ideas were active, meaning that they could not rely on experience alone, but needed to comprehend causal connections. Inadequate ideas were largely passive, by which Spinoza meant that some portions of adequate ideas do not apprehend the full causal connections between the idea and action.

There is ongoing debate regarding the convergence of emotion and affect. Some scholars demand that the two concepts remain distinct, although linked. Massumi (2002) argued that there is a difference between emotion and affect. Affect, for Massumi, specifically reflects the idea of intensity. Massumi drew upon Spinoza’s conceptualization of affect. For Massumi, affecting and being affected always go together; that is, when one affects something, one is open to being affected. Affect is an embodied experience, like emotion, but affects, according to Massumi, are “basically ways of connecting, to others and to other situations” (2003, p. 5). Massumi argued that
both affect and emotion are embodied experiences, but that affect is subject to external elements in ways emotions are not. Massumi’s argument positions emotions as not relational. For Massumi, “emotion is a very partial expression of affect” (p. 4). Emotion has access to only a limited selection of memories and cannot “encompass all the depth and breadth of our experiencing of experiencing” (p. 4). In contrast, affect acts on affect, redoubling through additional experiences and affects. McCormack (2003) agreed with Massumi, believing that affect “is never reducible to the personal quality of emotion” (p. 501) and arguing that affect is contingent on the multiplicity of space, experience, and identity.

Other scholars address different—upwards of three—types of affect. These are transitive, personal, and an intermediary between the two that is best expressed as Spinozan (Bertelsen & Murphie, 2010). An understanding of transitivity relies upon an understanding of affect that stems from Guattari (Félix Guattari & Genosko, 1996). The transitive, or pre-personal, movements of affects are a pre-discursive understanding of affect. Transitive affect is not founded “upon systems of distinctive oppositions,” but rather installed before the “circumscription of identities, and manifested by unlocatable transfersences” (Guattari & Genosko, 1996, p. 158). Guattari and Genosko (1996) argued that the transmission of affect beyond a shared experience is better understood within ethical and aesthetic paradigms rather than through the lens of science, as it is often understood in the West. Transitive expression of affect was about the unspoken transmission of affect through an assimilative empathic experience—for example, the understanding of the feel of a room when one walks into it, as laid out by Brennan (2004). One can walk into a room and gain an impression from the room that “we are not
self-contained in terms of our energies” (Brennan, 2004, p. 6). Energies circulate in a room and cause affects to be communicated from one person to another.

The second type of affect is the personal—the element with which laypeople are perhaps most familiar. The personal type consists of physiological responses to stimuli or emotions. Emotions represent “the ongoing folding of self and world, as the person” (Bertelsen & Murphie, 2010, p. 140). The complexities of emotions are mapped onto the body, and these mappings are shared beyond the personalized embodiment (Massumi, 2003). Mappings are manifested through physical states and representations of physiological responses, such as increased heart rate, trembling, crying, laughter, and so on. This second type of affect is still different from a Spinozan understanding of emotion. With affect, we are never alone. That is, through affect, even expressed or understood as emotion, one is connected to and affecting another, and the affects/emotions are driven or influenced by others (Massumi, 2003).

Finally, the third type of affect is the ability to affect and be the affected. This third expression comes most directly from Spinoza (1992). It is transactional, translational, and interpersonal. Affect is the “passage from one state to another” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 49). This is an understanding that “so long as our feelings or affects spring from the external encounter with other modes of existence, they are explained by the nature of the affecting body and by the necessarily inadequate idea of that body” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 50). It is from the second conception that I take my understanding of affect. I see the interaction between bodies with a shared (embodied or otherwise)
experience as the conatus of action—that is, the impulse and tendency toward self-preservation and activity (Spinoza, 1992, p. 109).

The two emotions that Spinoza was most concerned with were hope and fear, as both “relate to uncertainty over what the future will bring” (Moisi, 2009, p. 15) and cause action or inaction. I am interested in the relationships between emotions and action. A tendency toward action engenders activity (Massumi, 2015; Spinoza, 1992). For Spinoza (1992) the ultimate impetus for action was the will preserve the self, which he called conatus. I believe that without conatus, the will to engage in scholarship, activism, or activist scholarship would be nonexistent.

**Emotions and Affect: A Productive Intersection**

While I align myself with the second conception of affect, I also believe that affect can be too theoretical. I agree with Ahmed (2010), who argued that drawing a line between affect and emotion was unproductive. While there are differences between affect and emotion and “you can separate an affective response from an emotion that is attributed as such (the bodily sensations from the feeling of being afraid), this does not mean that in practice, or in everyday life, they are separate” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 231). Echoing Ahmed’s (2014) argument, Pellegrini and Puar (2009) contended that the distinctions between the terms *affect, emotion,* and even *feelings* were nothing more than semantic quibbles or attempts at genealogical purity or loyalty.
Thien (2005) argued that by taking emotion out of affect and demarcating a border between emotion and affect, theorists reified “the binary trope of emotion as negatively positioned in opposition to reason, as objectionably soft and implicitly feminized” (p. 452). Dividing affect from emotion re-creates the false binary between the personal and the political, which has been extensively critiqued by feminist scholars (Hanisch, 2000; Hill Collins, 2000; Lorde, 1984).

Ahmed (2010) argued that emotions can stick to a space, a location, or a person. Stickiness “involves a form of relationality” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 91). This relationality has important implications for activist work. I expand Ahmed’s idea of stickiness to relate to the ways individuals experience a transmission of affect. Because affect is transmitted through external stimuli, the stickiness of emotion serves as a connector of activism and activists. By stickiness, I mean the transmission of emotions between people that serves to bind them together (Ahmed, 2004). This binding together through emotion may serve to further activist engagement (Askins, 2009; G. Brown & Pickerill, 2009).

For researchers who see ourselves as activist-scholars, binding ourselves too tightly to theory and philosophy, to the detriment of action and activism, can become a “narcissistic self-indulgent practice that most seeks to create a gap between theory and practice so as to perpetuate class elitism” (hooks, 1991, pp. 4–5). Ahmed (2014) argued that historically, affect left the materiality of the body behind, whereas emotion offered a way of understanding the lived corporeal nature of our world. Further, she argued that affect, in the idea of an affective turn, did a disservice to the idea that this turn was to “usher in a new world, as a way of moving beyond an implied impasse, in which body
and mind, and reason and passion, were treated as separate” (p. 206). Feminists and scholars of color have been speaking to the centrality of emotions and challenging mind-body dualism, the distinction between reason and passion, since long before any so-called affective turn (circa 2000) (P. T. Clough & Halley, 2007). The affective turn has come to privilege affect over emotion (Ahmed, 2014), and this “affect/emotion distinction can operate as a gendered distinction” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 207). This distinction is a way of gatekeeping and a reification of a certain type of knowledge.

**Emotions Deployed by Activists and the Masses**

The two primary affects focused on by Spinoza were fear and hope. It is hope that calls people to become involved with direct forms of activism, and to remain active and enjoy the work (Ahmed, 2014). Without this element of the work, activism is hard to maintain, even if conatus is ever present (Ahmed, 2014). Ahmed (2014) contended that without hope, there is no protest, activist, or activism. Hope “allows us to feel that what angers us is not inevitable, even if transformation can sometimes feel impossible” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 184). That is not to say that for Ahmed, activism and resistance without hope do not exist.

Defiant actions in the face of overwhelmingly negative odds happen as well. The Occupy movement was just this. There was little hope that the movement would change the economic systems, but it sparked and engendered a larger conversation about income inequality. Failure to meet ultimate end goals can still be generative (Halberstam, 2011; Sørensen, 2017). I believe that activist movements can exist without hope for change, but with a simple imperative to challenge the status quo. I agree with Derrick Bell (1993)
who argued that the acknowledgement of the permanence of racism produces a dread that acknowledges any victory against white supremacy will be short lived. That does not mean that activists do no engage in activism despite this dread. Indeed, this dread is an act of defiance against overwhelming odds. This dread, along with despair and exhaustion “produced by the ‘inevitability’ of the repetition of that which one is against” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 184) is what helps to drive not only my activism, but I believe the activism of many other activists. Attending to emotions helps sustain activism “through emotional reflexivity, creating sustaining spaces to create space for emotion in activism” (G. Brown & Pickerill, 2009, p. 33).

Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta (2001) argued that there are two types of emotions that generate movement within activist communities. These are reciprocal emotions and shared emotions. Reciprocal emotions are the feelings activists experience with one another and are the feelings that generate community. The emotions are exhibited as the “close affective ties of friendship, love, solidarity, and loyalty” (Goodwin et al., 2001, p. 20). Shared emotions may be just that—shared—but unlike reciprocal emotions, they do not have their fellow activists as their object. Reciprocal and shared emotions can be expressed as anger “toward outsiders, or outrage over government policies” (Goodwin et al., 2001, p. 20)—for example, the perceived othering of members of the Aryan Nation uses these emotions to bind the value of Whiteness to White supremacy.

Activist communities are not politically isolated. They exist on many sides of political dimensions and, despite having disparate aims, share in common the experience of humanity (Bosco, 2007; Calhoun, 2001; Chalabi, 2016; N. L. Clough, 2012; Goodwin
et al., 2001; Lopez, 2014). Part of this experience is the emotionality indicative of an articulated human experience. Shared emotions and reciprocal emotions are generative of community-building. Shared and reciprocal emotions work together and reinforce one another to build a movement’s culture.\(^{35}\)

Despite the centrality of emotions to the human experience, emotions may be seen as shameful. Emotions “appear usually on the embarrassing side of a dichotomy” (Calhoun, 2001, p. 52), and I believe that for this reason emotions have been neglected as a field of serious inquiry. To study emotions only outside traditional hegemonic cisheteropatriarchal realms of power reifies a binary of rationality and emotionality. Some may argue that to study emotions is to have “a better causal understanding of the ‘nuts and bolts’ of popular mobilization” (Goodwin & Pfaff, 2001, p. 301). However, studying emotions only as embodied by queered individuals “retain[s] the assumption that emotions come into play only on the part of outsiders” (Ost, 2004, p. 235). This (re)creates a binary of normal and abnormal politics—one imbued with emotion, the other with rationality. Queering dominant discourses (re)creates the binary of normal/abnormal politics and deconstructs this understanding of this binary. Politics,

\(^{35}\) This deep devotion to in-group/out-group relations, as expressed by these emotions, may do little more than reify the neoliberal order (Wilkinson, 2009). Creating a structure in which someone is on the inside also creates an outside. This inside/outside dynamic makes it harder for individuals who have an interest in the same outcome to become invested in and involved with a movement. Therefore, the movement becomes less about accomplishing aims and more about who is more “down.” While activists may hope to escape the neoliberal order of things through their activism, the emotions that create these spaces may “mirror those found in mainstream society” (Wilkinson, 2009, p. 42), which the activists are often attempting to unmake.
emotions, and insider/outsider binary relations are unhelpful at best; more likely, they are destructive in their deployment (de Lauretis, 1991).

Educational researchers must contend with the fact that emotions are central to contemporary political discourse. Indeed, contemporary political discourse is emotion (N. L. Clough, 2012; Loseke, 2009; Moisi, 2009; Ost, 2004). The assumption that emotions are central only to movements of marginalized populations (Ost, 2004) reifies dominant discourses that deride emotions as irrational and unproductive. I have illustrated the many times that emotionality has been set in opposition to rationality, always falling “on the ‘bad’ side of a number of prominent dichotomies in Western thought, including body and mind, nature and culture, female and male, private and public” (Goodwin et al., 2001, p. 15). To continue to perpetuate this dualism, runs in opposition to liberatory movements, because emotions are not felt only by the opposition, but by all, and thus are central to political discourse (Ost, 2004).

**Emotions and Activism**

Research exploring the role of emotions as binding agents is quite diverse. Researchers all over the world have illustrated how emotions have served to bind communities not only to one another, but also to their cause. For instance, Clough (2012), as a member of an anarchist group that organized resistance to the 2008 Republican National Convention, completed ethnographic research that analyzed affective structures of organizing. He used affect and emotion, positioning emotion as consciously experienced feelings and affect using a Spinozan (1677/1992) interpretation, which means he positioned affect as bodies coming together in community to increase their
capacity to act. For Clough, affect described the “existing strength of collective action to operate on the world, it is the ‘power to act’ amplified through collectivity” (2012, p. 1669).

Clough’s work built on a number of previous studies, including Chatterton (2008) and Bosco (2007). All three studied the ways that feelings and “emotional bonds are] intended to accelerate social struggle” (Clough, 2012, p. 1670) to understand the organizing practices of activists resisting conservative politics. Clough illustrated the ways the “state operates on the emotions of activists in order to deescalate their tactics, inhibit new member recruitment, and limit the ability of movements to sustain their momentum or act as effective political agents” (2012, p. 1671). He placed importance on affect and emotion in building community, which reflects the findings of many other scholars (Ahmed, 2014; Bosco, 2007; Goodwin et al., 2001). For Clough, however, what was important was the role of “affinity as an emotional and organization principal” (2012, p. 1669). His work echoes that of Ahmed (2014), who explored how emotions bind groups together.

An open question remains for me: How does Clough’s (2012) work intersect with the precarity of faculty research (Adsit et al., 2015) when the faculty member is an employee of the state? This is not something that Clough (2012) addresses, but I believe this precarity is important for scholar-activists to consider. The precarity and struggles of working toward diversity and inclusion have been well documented by Adsit et al. (2015) and Ahmed (2012, 2017).
Rodgers (2010) explored and bridged the theoretical divide between affective laborers’ (Oksala, 2016) emotions and their work through 50 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with present and former employees of Amnesty International. Rodgers’s work began with a quote from an employee, who stated that “anger is why we’re all here, it’s why we all chose to work in an NGO rather than somewhere else … anger at injustice … and even anger that we live the life we live” (2010, p. 273). As an employer, Amnesty International used emotions, particularly anger, to recruit people to work at the organization and engage with the work.

Building on the work of Goodwin et al. (2001), Rodgers (2010) studied the centrality of emotions to social movements, and the extent to which human rights NGOs, such as Amnesty International, might exploit and abuse the ties between emotionality and commitment. She hypothesized that such exploitation would create a culture of dysfunction, emotional burnout, and disaffection. Rodgers determined through this work that emotions motivated human rights professionals but that emotions alone were not enough to sustain the emotional energy for their activism.

In my own work, I have found this to be true. Working in a multicultural center for 10 years, I was often angry, and it caused me severe health concerns (Weiser, Lawter, Wagner, in press). While emotions were central to my work over this time, they were not enough to sustain me, and I firsthand have seen how emotions are deployed as a means to keep people engaged in work. In the end, I knew that I could not remain in that role and remain healthy, and that I could do the work in another way.
Bosco (2007) conducted ethnographic and archival research to explore the affective labor that created and sustained activist networks in Argentina and beyond. He argued that “much of what can explain the sustainability and expansion of the two networks has to do with the emotions of activism and with the emotional connections among participants themselves and among participants and their supporters” (Bosco, 2007, p. 546). These emotions draw people together and may even counteract the kind of emotional draining that Rodgers described (2010). Bosco alluded to the debate about the distinction between affect and emotions (Thien, 2005), concluding that despite the debate, much consensus had been found on the “emotional relationality between people and environments and on the location of emotion in both bodies and places, or more generally on the ways in which emotions mediate society and space” (Bosco, 2007, p. 546).

This relationality between people and their space has also been covered by Brennan (2004) and Ahmed (2012, 2017). Bosco (2007) published this work at the dawn of internet-based social media usage and found that the then-emergent technology was crucial in the connection of activist networks. Bosco drew on Goodwin et al. (2000) to explore how the bonds of these internet-based communities facilitated and mobilized activists in more-familiar social settings. He argued that the “emotional dimensions of social networks are crucial for the emergence and cohesion of activists in social movements” (Bosco, 2007, p. 549). Indeed, emotional bonds are essential in facilitating the new and innovative networks that foster collaborative work. Alliance-building through emotion is what binds people together (Ahmed, 2014). I believe that alliance-
building creates between groups a sense of solidarity that may serve to challenge the hegemony of the state.

Such was the case with community activists in the study by Crossa (2013). In this project, Crossa examined the playful means street vendors and artisans in Mexico City used to build and sustain the emotional energy to resist the displacement of their livelihoods through government gentrification of their neighborhood. Crossa found that laughter, play, and fun were important in the creation of community resistance to the forces of the state that threatened to displace and reshape their worlds. Likewise, Sørensen (2017) found through a multisite case study of protests that humor and fun added to protest, encouraged the building of community resistance, and also strengthened the commitment to and effectiveness of nonviolent protest. Sørensen asserted that “through their upbringing, people become subordinated to power and are not just free to decide to resist. Obedience and submission have infiltrated everyone’s lives and are embedded in people’s bodies and language, limiting what alternatives are even possible to imagine” (2017, p. 140). By engaging in play and humor, he argued, activists can disrupt power. If, he posited, Foucault’s (1978, 1995) assertion that the primary way of disciplining society is through its discourses, humor is a productive way to disrupt, circumvent, and otherwise undermine those discourses (Sørensen, 2017).

Sørensen (2017) found humor to be productive as a tactic of resistance. He argued that humor could either weaken or strengthen nonviolent action. Its role depended on how much humor was used, and to what end, in the protest. One instance of a productive use of humor was an airdrop of teddy bears onto Belarusian authorities. This action broke the
power of the authorities temporarily and enabled a dialogue between those who dropped the teddy bears and the general public. Unfortunately, the action also provoked the Belarusian authorities, who saw the airdrop as a violation of their airspace, to respond. The action illustrates how a humorous act can be generative in its failure (Halberstam, 2011). The airdrop enabled activists to open and sustain a dialogue with the nonengaged public (a generative use) even as it angered the Belarusian authorities (a failure). This instance is a manifestation of the “tension between the elements of dialogue facilitation and power breaking in a world of unequal power relations. The symbol of the cute and naïve teddy bear is also an example of how humor can contribute to the utopian enactment of nonviolent action” (Sørensen, 2017, p. 148). The use of humor and other forms of emotion is a generative way to create community between groups.

I have long taught individuals about issues related to diversity and social justice. I challenge the practice of calling activists “social justice warriors” by jokingly referring to myself as a social justice bard instead. Sarcasm, humor, and satire did find their way into the art and the conversations that I participated in with the artists. I am not surprised by this, as I have long used these tools to teach about issues of oppression, as it creates a space where over-the-top moments of oppression can be laughed at and then deconstructed to see how simple acts make up this larger transgression.

Trauma can also bind people together (Sondel, Baggett, & Dunn, 2018). In the days immediately following the election of President Trump, educators scrambled to attend to the needs of students who were affected by his election (Sondel et al., 2018). Students and teachers alike faced fear about the future and how the election of Trump
might impact their lives (Massumi, 2010; Sondel et al., 2018). Sondel et al. (2018) outline a pedagogy of political trauma that serves “to alleviate and/or mediate trauma caused by events in the public sphere while simultaneously working toward the democratic and emancipatory purposes of education” (p. 176). The authors highlight the role of educators as arbiters of hope and healing when they support students and arm them with the critical capacity for social change. I think meeting students’ needs and helping them engage in work toward social justice has become more and more difficult in light of the recent challenge to teacher autonomy, related to neoliberal practices in the classroom (M. W. Apple, 2014). This work is difficult in higher education as well, where national and regional accrediting bodies adhere to neoliberal logics that privilege some disciplines over others (Adsit et al., 2015), and other accountability measures serve the state’s needs rather than students’ needs.

Reynolds (2010) used life history interviews to explore the role of gay former activists in Australia. Reynolds explored the divergent paths of gay activism in Australia in the 1970s and argued that not only trauma and anger, but also hope, motivated progressive activism. I agree with Reynolds that “hope complements anger in the constitution of progressive politics; the hope that traumatic injuries might be acknowledged and repaired” (2010, p. 286). While hope, trauma, and anger brought the gay community together, the action that took place in reaction to these emotions created fissures. While some activists saw the value in an agenda that took on legislation, others were alienated by that focus (Reynolds, 2010). Reynolds built on the work of Cvetkovich (2003) to explore the role of mourning as an affective reality of the gay community and represented the eventual dissolution of the radical gay activist community, including how
Kotliar (2016) conducted ethnographic research between 2010 and 2012 on a left-wing political group in Israel known as Psychoactive. He argued that while the role of emotions in social movements has been acknowledged, emotions have been positioned mainly as means to a political end, rather than an end in themselves. He attempted to address whether and how activists negotiate “state imposed emotional styles,” how they “debate politically drawn emotional boundaries”, how “they oppose state-led constructions of affect” and in what ways they promote “alternative ways of feeling” (p. 268). Kotliar studied the actions taken by Psychoactive in response to legislation that prohibited expressions of mourning toward the Nakba, also known as the Day of Catastrophe, the day after Israeli independence (Frankel, 2003). Psychoactive saw this legislation as an opportunity to resist forced emotional discourses, as their main “asset” was “the struggle over Israeli emotions” (Kotliar, 2016, p. 275). The prohibition of mourning as a response to the Nakba has implications for denial and silencing of what some experience as trauma related to Israeli independence.

The struggle over the Nakba bill gives a glimpse into the many ways progressive movements can respond to repressive state-led actions. In the case of Psychoactive, activists responded to the challenge to emotions with emotions. Psychoactive directly used emotions as a tool of resistance by shaping the “emotional responses of Israeli citizens to a pivotal historical event — the 1948 war — and to the downfall of their Palestinian foes” (Kotliar, 2016, p. 282). This bill legislated the only appropriate
responses—celebration and joy—to Israeli independence and, by extension, in response to the destruction of the Palestinian state. Anything other than a positive reaction was seen as treasonous. Psychoactive directly engaged by promoting an alternative emotional style, one rooted in healing and in therapeutic and emotional discourse.

It is important to note the repressive ways emotive discourse can be deployed by the state as a means of control (Massumi, 2010; Ost, 2004). While Psychoactive focused exclusively on Israel and Palestine, governments in many other regions have also introduced emotive bills, such as the proliferation of U.S.-based bills that prohibited teachers talking about LGBT concerns in their classrooms.

Woods, Anderson, Guilbert, and Watkin (2012) analyzed interviews and ethnographic observations, as well as press reports, memoirs, and promotional materials, to explore the countryside marches that took place in Great Britain between 1998 and 2002. They also used the results from a questionnaire with more than 1,200 respondents. This data was analyzed to gain insight into the emotional context of rural British activists protesting changes to the countryside. This movement was a pastiche of campaigns on different issues, drawn together through overlapping participation by various activists. Some of the issues were hunting, wind farm development, and farming. The makeup of the activists was overwhelmingly conservative, unlike in the majority of the literature on activists. The authors described five important aspects of emotions and social movements. First, emotions in activism were related to value systems. Second, emotions were collective as well as individual. Third, emotions were crucial to the creation and mobilization of movements. Fourth, emotions may have distorted strategies. And fifth,
emotions were “intended to move the emotions of onlookers, either to recruit new members, or to shape public opinion and place pressure on a third party” (Woods et al., 2012, p. 570).

This study focused not on progressive activism but on “traditionally rural residents” who, in response to state actions that threatened jobs, hunting, and farming, became more endeared “towards protest, replacing emotions of fear and trepidation towards political action with emotions of pride and pleasure” (Woods et al., 2012, p. 570). Woods et al. (2012) illustrated how emotions were present and complicit in all manifestations of activism, and that emotions were not necessarily coupled to a political ideology. They also illustrated that emotions “should not be mistaken as instinctive, primeval impulses that compel protest. As the case study reflected, emotions were consciously and reflexively engaged by protest participants and organizers” (Woods et al., 2012, p. 582).

**Emotions on the periphery.**

Emotions involve “affective forms of (re)orientation” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 2). Emotions cause people to move toward or away from things, based on their feelings about them. Emotions can cause people to become oriented or disoriented in particular ways. Similar to how someone cannot see that other people have more privilege without acknowledging their own lack of privilege, understanding one’s need for orientation involves acknowledging that one has become, or is, dis/oriented. Being led by emotions that have been decentered, or moved to the periphery, involves the experience of disorientation (Ahmed, 2006). One who embodies privilege never has to think about not
being oriented to normative social practices in the world. Privileged bodies collude with the objects around them and rarely find themselves interacting with objects being disorienting. For instance, in teaching students how to conduct research on Trans issues, one reifies the disorienting power structure of institutional libraries (Weiser, Wagner, & Lawter, in press). In order to find information on Trans individuals in a library, one must use violent language. For instance, literature on Trans people is cataloged from a frame of paraphilia, which is linked to a historical connotation of perversion (Adler, 2013). This perpetuates the understanding of what is normal, and what is deemed acceptable, in the eyes of those creating the catalog (Berman, 1993). The act of disorientation involves an embodiment that is juxtaposed with the regimes of the normal (Ahmed, 2006; Warner, 1993).

Thus, to engage with research involving emotions, the researcher and participants must exist as both disoriented (emotional) and oriented (rational). Those who regard and center emotions as ways of knowing, as epistemological primacy, are dis/oriented by the relegation of emotion to the periphery in contemporary research (Ahmed, 2006; Jaggar, 1989). I contend that those who have experienced this disorientation may be able to layer these experiences discursively, having a lived and embodied experience of navigating both orientation and disorientation. To be oriented is to not know that one has been oriented, as this is a natural phenomenon for the oriented (Ahmed, 2006). To exist as disoriented means to exist beyond and outside normative regimes. Therefore, those who exist within these normative regimes, who have built the regimes, experience regimes as routine. To disorient means to make the familiar strange. Researchers need to (re)orient their thinking about emotion as not in opposition to rationality, but rather, as part of the
composite whole of the human experience (Ahmed, 2006; Delgado, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Jaggar (1989) argued that all emotions have in part been relegated to the periphery, because historically, rationality has been the valued way to acquire knowledge. Further, where emotion and rationality are cast as diametrically opposed, rationality has been associated with “the universal, the public and the male, whereas emotion has been associated with the irrational, the physical, the natural, the particular, the private and, of course, the female” (Jaggar, 1989, p. 151). This relegation of emotions to embodied experiences only is a marker of the mind and body dialectic. Emotions are seen as being in direct conflict with reason and cognition (Calhoun, 2001). As such, emotions have been derided for the assumption that they are a product of the body, or the feminine.

Poststructural feminists and queer theorists challenge the coupling of emotion and the feminine, as well as all binaries (Gamson, 2000; Plummer, 2013). Thus, any “uncritical reproduction of the mind/body distinction ought to be rethought for the implicit gender hierarchy that the distinction has conventionally produced” (Butler, 2006, p. 17). Beyond the gender hierarchy to which Butler (1990/2006) referred, emotions also have a long history of being raced in particular ways that have set them apart from the Eurocentric ideal of rationality.

Whiteness has not always looked the same throughout history, as ideas always shift. Whiteness colludes with reason and rationality and has done so since the European Enlightenment (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2000). In the European Enlightenment, Whiteness came to represent “orderliness, rationality, and self-control” (Kincheloe &
Steinberg, 2000, p. 5). This was further reified through the writing of the era, which always framed the White European subject in rational ways. “Rationality emerged as the conceptual base around which civilization and savagery could be delineated” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2000, p. 5). The White European came to represent civilization in the Western imagination, and anything that was not White European was cast as savage. Since the European Enlightenment, Whiteness has come to be understood as that which privileges “mind over body; intellectual over experiential ways of knowing and mental abstractions over passion, bodily sensations, and tactile understanding” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2000, p. 5). Thus, it is no surprise that embodied knowledge is seen as subversive, insubstantial, and of little or no consequence; all emotions as points of knowledge have been derided as less than and separate from reason and rationality (Jaggar, 1989; Nicolazzo, 2017; Thien, 2005).

Rationality is treated as “more cultivated” (Berlant, 2004, p. 47) than emotions, yet both rational cognition and emotion are shaped by the tools of structured and unstructured learning. Goodwin and other authors (2001) argued that Max Weber bore part of the responsibility for the contemporary derision of emotions and their association with irrationality. Weber (1978) contended that social scientists “treat all irrational, affectually determined elements of behavior as factors of deviation from a conceptually pure type of rational action” (1978, p. 6). Dobbin (2001) asserted that the legacy of this verstehen led Weber’s descendants to position rationality as the framework with which to make sense of the world. By contrast, emotionality has been framed as reactive. While Weber recognized that a gray area between rationality and emotionality existed, he
“generally assumed that rational action could not be emotional, and vice versa. Social scientists have been traveling down this road ever since” (Goodwin et al., 2001, p. 2).

Berlant (2004) argued that both rational cognition and emotion are expressed by embodied experiences. The difference (and accompanying hierarchy) are that emotion is read as raw, quick, guttural embodiment, whereas rational thoughts “are admired as fine manifestations of self-control” (Berlant, 2004, p. 48). While many scholars disparage emotions as subversive of knowledge, others frame emotions as central to understanding both individuals and nations.

Moisi (2009), a French political scientist, posited that three dominant emotions were shaping the future of the globe. He analyzed emotion at the macro level and applied the second understanding of affect laid out by Bertelsen and Murphie (2010). Moisi (2009) studied the interpersonal understanding of the transaction of embodied emotion. He argued that three emotions—fear, hope, and humiliation—take primacy over all others because at their core, they are related to confidence. He argued that fear is the lack of confidence, hope is an expression of confidence, and humiliation is injured confidence. He suggested that these three emotions shape the world through their mass expressions.

I believe that fear is closely related to affective events. Affective events are vague experiences that may manifest as potential—something that may occur in the future—or as preemptive action (Bertelsen & Murphie, 2010; Massumi, 2010). In this way, affect may be leveraged by states to maintain hegemony by playing upon the fear of citizens. Even if there is no threat, the threat will be real “not in spite of its nonexistence. It is superlatively real, because of it” (Massumi, 2010, p. 53). Fear is being “apprehensive
about the present and expects the future to become ever more dangerous” (Moisi, 2009, p. 5). Hegemony is managed and deployed by the White cisgender patriarchy through fear, which brings about an authoritarian mode of governmentality (Moisi, 2009).

The second of the three emotions is hope, or the “conviction that today is better than yesterday and that tomorrow will be better than today” (Moisi, 2009, p. 5). Hope expresses confidence in the here and now—one feels confident that he/she/ze has a handle on the world, on the self. President Barack Obama famously ran on a platform of hope, expressed by the famous Shepard Fairey poster emblazoned with the word. To have hope means to never settle and to be confident in the here and now.

Finally, to experience humiliation is to acknowledge “the injured confidence of those who have lost hope in the future; your lack of hope is the fault of others, who have treated you badly in the past” (Moisi, 2009, p. 5). Humiliation, like many things, manifests both positively and negatively. It can be an incentive in small doses, or it can be overwhelming to the point that one gives up, or perhaps lashes out against those seen as the cause of the humiliation (Moisi, 2009). It is the feeling that one is no longer in control of his/hir/her/their life. For Moisi, all three of these emotions are important. He posited that a balance of these emotions is important for the “health of the world” (2009, p. 15).

I argue that emotions are central to activism, and that conatus drives activism (Spinoza, 1992). “Most accounts of activism touch upon ‘sense’, ‘feeling’, that inexplicable desire to ‘do something’ in some way” (Askins, 2009, p. 7). It is this sense
of the ability to do something in some way that drives activists and activist-scholars to leverage emotion for political capital.

Emotions are not only individual experiences but also can be expressed and felt by communities. Emotions stick to spaces and individuals, and this stickiness moves beyond the personal and adheres to communities (Ahmed, 2014). This adhesion creates bonds that inspire communal conatus (Spinoza, 1677/1992). Emotions “are also political and can be utilized to maintain the status quo” (Wilkinson, 2009, p. 36) or to fight against it. As of this writing, the majority of the United States is experiencing a moment of intensified antagonistic discourse perpetrated by the Trump regime. We are in a moment of heightened scurrility over language and how it is deployed either in support of the Trump regime and its objectives, or in dissent. State supporters—in this case MAGA supporters and Trump surrogates—frame those who challenge the state as of questionable moral fiber (Berlant, 2004). Thus, speaking against normative discourses has been framed as irrational and emotional.

Mehta (2017), writing in the *National Review*, characterized those who oppose Trump as alarmists and argued that democratic norms cannot be eroded by the actions of Donald Trump. He further argued that labeling those who oppose Trump as a resistance is a fallacy—that, in fact, they are obstructionists. Mehta argued that “how we describe something can confer a profound moral valence upon it” (2017, p. n.p.). The media has trumpeted the left’s actions against Trump as resistance, but during the Obama administration, similar actions were deemed obstructionist (Mehta, 2017). He argued that the actions of both Obama detractors and Trump detractors are nothing more than
obstruction, “something irrational, nefarious, or even dishonest that needs to be overcome” (2017, p. n.p.). Further, the idea of a resistance calls to mind “visions of brave, self-sacrificing Europeans standing against the Nazi terror or General Leia withstanding the First Order” (Mehta, 2017, p. n.p.).

Morrissey (2017), in the *NY Post*, argued that the Women’s March after the inauguration of Trump “descended” on the capital, “riot[ing] from the night before the inauguration until well after Donald Trump’s oath of office, all before Trump had a chance to implement even one of his policies.” Thus, Morrissey framed the actions of those who oppose Trump as irrational and an “attack on democracy” (2017, p. n.p.). Further, Morrissey argued that the actions by the left were “not a rational or lawful exercise of freedom of speech but a violent temper tantrum by those who will accept no governance other than their own rule, regardless of the expressed will of the electorate” (2017, p. n.p.).

This is ironic, as the communications coming from the Trump regime are also often emotional. Trump began his presidency by deploying fear, speaking of an “American carnage” (D. J. Trump, 2017a). He summoned up images of mothers and children trapped in poverty in our inner cities; of rusted-out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation; of an education system flush with cash but leaving our young and beautiful students deprived of knowledge; and of the crime, gangs, and drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealized potential (D. J. Trump, 2017a).
The 2018 State of the Union used xenophobic tensions to rally support for Trump’s message by casting violence by immigrants as an epidemic (Holland, 2017). Trump also used the image of children as a rallying point, speaking about the killing of two teenage girls on Long Island by MS-13, a gang originating in Los Angeles and consisting mostly of individuals with roots in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala (FBI, 2009). By purposely targeting a gang that consists mostly of men of Color, Trump and his surrogates played on nationalist ideas, namely racism, nativism, and xenophobia. By calling out gang members as agents of violence, rather than calling out the violence of poverty and unstable work conditions, which contributes to gang involvement, Trump continued a war on symptoms, rather than on causes. Rather than use the State of the Union to speak on comprehensive immigration reform and allowing immigrants easier access to paying jobs, Trump used fear as an emotional ploy to support the wall he wants to build between Mexico and the United States. He repeatedly deployed fear as an affective means to control political discourse, and it matters little whether what he declared was based on “fake news” or not, because that affect was felt and absorbed by his audience (Massumi, 2010; Ost, 2004).

Emotions as political discourse—queering emotions and political discourse.

Emotions cause us to act, and affect is the drive to act based on emotion (Spinoza, 1677/1992). Above, I have explained the way that emotions are centered, decentered, and understood, and how reason and emotion reflect the mind/body dialectic. In this section, I examine postmodern frames of emotion. I start with Foucault (1978) then move to Ahmed (2014), Butler (2011), and Sedgwick (2003) to understand the deployment of emotions in political discourse. Because this project is about understanding the emotional
lives of millennial activists in the contemporary political moment, it is important to understand how emotions have been framed and spoken about in a postmodern context.

Foucault (1978) questioned a simple dialectical understanding of discourse. He argued that through discourse, knowledge and power are joined (Foucault, 1978). Emotion and discourse are different manifestations of power (Ahmed, 2014; Lutz, 2002), and they are alike in that they do not exist in a world “divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse … but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies” (Foucault, 1978, p. 100). Questioning the binary of accepted/excluded discourses (Butler, 2011) is a part of this project. As such, the artists confronted many traditionally accepted discourses, such as Whiteness, capitalism, heterosexuality, masculinity) and explored and amplified excluded discourses such as femininity, queerness, identities of color.

The effects of discourse on our embodied experiences start early in life. Being called a “girl” at birth, or the girling of a child, has lifelong impacts on the lived realities of that child (Butler, 2011). The “discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names” (Butler, 2011, p. xxi) is the citation, iteration, and repetition of acts that produce reality. It is through this act of citationality, in which acts of speech create an “action and exercise a binding power,” that “power acts as discourse” (Butler, 2011, p. 171).

Feminist scholars have long examined the supposed divide between the personal and political, a further extrapolation of the dialectic of mind/body. Language “can be productive of reality” (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 5); language itself produces reality. This is a chief concern of anti-essentialist inquiry (Sedgwick, 2003). According to Sedgwick
(2003), an understanding of symbolic binary oppositions uncovers oppositions between realities and words, heterosexual and nonheterosexual, man and not-man, or rationality and irrationality (emotionality). These binaries reinforce hegemonies and supremacies. Attachment to a binary way of thought leads individuals to understand that “term B is not symmetrical with but subordinated to term A; but second, the ontologically valorized term A actually depends for its meaning on the simultaneous subsumption and exclusion of term B” (Sedgwick, 1990/2008, p. 10). Moreover, this division is unstable and will continue to yield conflict, subsume liberation, and engulf subjects/ivity.

Sedgwick (1990/2008) argued that we are forced to exist in a dualistic reality. In this reality, emotions are derided for their inability to be as productive as rationality in a political realm. While rationality subsumes emotionality in these arguments, emotions are still used by politicians to leverage support. I believe that emotions play a large role in the deployment of activism, driving individuals to activism, as well as away from it. In looking at the political angst surrounding the election of the 45th U.S. president, it is evident that emotions played a large role in early resistance efforts such as rallying support against the executive order known as the Muslim ban (J. E. Bromwich, 2017), protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline (Wikstrom, 2017), and the Woman’s March (Lapowsky, 2017). At the same time, Trump supporters and other right-wing critics deployed dominant narratives that derided emotionality and positioned it as irrational. In contemporary political discourse, Trump and his surrogates deployed the term snowflake—meaning someone who believes he/she/ze is special—to patronize and dismiss progressive activists and their critiques (Friedersdorf, 2015; Serwer, 2017). While some research on emotion focused on politicians (Berlant, 2004; Loseke, 2009;
Marcus, 2000; Ost, 2004), other research on emotion focused on social movements (Adsit et al., 2015; Askins, 2009; Bailey, 2017; G. Brown & Pickerill, 2009; Gerbaudo, 2012; Goodwin et al., 2001; Turner, 2007; Wilkinson, 2009). I believe studying the way that power is often deployed by far- and right-wing politicians and experienced by the masses in the form of emotions is essential in order to encourage activism that confronts inequities in the status quo.

Given the historical dominance and privileging of rationality in political discourse (Marcus, 2000; Massumi, 2015) research (Fine, 1994; Hill Collins, 2000; Jaggar, 1989; Lorde, 1984), I contend that the centering and privileging of emotions is a subversive act, and thus a queer act. Here, I am deploying the word *queer* to mean nonnormative action or choice—a transgression, rather than a sexuality (Anzaldúa, 2010). To queer an understanding of emotion is not just to study the emotions of queer subjectivities, but to examine ways one can queer normative understandings of emotion (Cvetkovich, 2003). When one queers action as activism intentionally and discursively, one usurps the citationality of rationality and all the trappings of the idea of rational science. A queer approach to emotion, affect, and activism allows me to center emotions. Querness is an active resistance to the “regimes of the normal” (Warner, 1993, p. xxvi). Therefore, I argue, centering emotions that have been pushed to the periphery is a logical extension of the queer project.

If I center the emotions of individuals who may use them in a political context, I queer my approach to emotions and collaborators. In process and practice, I must ask which emotions experienced by the artists are centered and why, and which emotions
discursively deployed by the state are centered and why. Typically, the latter emotions reflect a White cisgender and heteronormative\textsuperscript{36} state. De Lauretis (1991) argued that queerness and queering an approach to emotions are a resistance “to cultural homogenization, countering dominant discourses with other constructions of the subject in culture” (de Lauretis, 1991, p. iii). However, committing to queering my research means I must problematize discourse and the way I literally queer theory, “defining itself against the normal” (Warner, 1993, p. xxvi). I am involved not only in the work of discourse production, but in “the necessary critical work of deconstructing [my] own discourses and their constructed silences” (de Lauretis, 1991, p. iv). By reflecting on my own discourses as a queer activist-scholar, I continue to challenge the hegemonic effects of cisgender patriarchy on my own binarized thinking. Educational researchers committed to social justice must ask: How am I complicit in the safety of queerness? For example, if I center emotion and affect and nonnormative performances of emotion and affect, I have chosen a priori to privilege some emotions over others. And queer theory insists that scholars not fall into the traps of White supremacist power that reify Whiteness and White emotions. Queerness insists that scholars “construct another discursive horizon” (de Lauretis, 1991, p. iv), one that is inclusive of queer subjectivities.

**Emotions used by politicians in contemporary politics.**

The role of emotion as embodied and deployed by politicians has been well documented by Marcus (2000). He connected emotional deployment with personality in a

\textsuperscript{36} Shorthand for cisgender and heteronormative, cisgender being an alignment of gender and sex assigned at birth, and heteronormative being compulsory and assumed heterosexuality (LeMaster, 2017).
gridwork fashion. Using Barber’s (1972) personality theory, which categorized individuals into two basic dispositions, a “characteristic inclination to action (active) or inaction (passive) and a characteristic inclination to anticipate rewards (positive) or punishments (negative)” (Marcus, 2000, p. 226). Marcus built upon the work of Spinoza (1677/1992), who defined affect as the choice for action or inaction. This addition by Marcus (2000) helped explain how emotion plays a role in the personalities of leaders and individuals. Marcus differentiated between people who were more inclined toward action or inaction and, most important, between those who anticipated rewards (positive experiences) or punishments (negative experiences). Those who were inclined to expect punishment regardless of their actions were more likely to accept punishment. This is important to note in this project as individuals experience affects that may cause action or inaction. Emotions play a strong role in the actions taken not only by activists (Rodgers, 2010; Rosa, 2016), but also in the general body politic (Renshon, Lee, & Tingley, 2015; Song, 2017).

_Fear._

The United States is perpetually at war (Vidal, 2002), but in a post-9/11 world, the enemy is no longer a foreign nation, but an ideology of inclusivity that presents a challenge to the hegemony of the state (Berlant, 2004; Puar & Rai, 2002). While the deployment of a statist ideology has long been central to education (Kaestle, 2011), a switch in focus occurred after 9/11 (Puar, 2007). The target of this war is the idea of terror and is made manifest through the embodiment of the terrorist (Puar, 2007; Puar & Rai, 2002). The idea and the image of the terrorist are not new fears, but an old fear of the “other” (Said, 1979). Our contemporary moment is bound up with a White supremacist
us-versus-them mentality, but with enough “good liberals” to deny that the fear of terrorism, of the terrorist, of the other, is about race (Puar, 2007; Puar & Rai, 2002). The warping of the image of the other, the terrorist, into a “monster” has been explored by Puar and Rai (2002).

Puar and Rai suggested that in a post-9/11 world, the fear of this monster has framed discourses of patriotism and dissention. The “monster-terrorist-fag is reticulated with discourses and practices of heteronormative patriotism” (Puar & Rai, 2002, p. 140) that have resurged in the new hypermasculine posturing that espouses statist ideology. These discourses are further complicated by the racialization of the monster-terrorist, and even of those who dissent from statist xenophobic practices. And so the lack of communication and connections “between white progressives and communities of color, especially those implicated by changing immigration laws, new ‘border’ hysteria, the Patriot Act, and the widespread detention of noncitizens” (Puar & Rai, 2002, p. 140) is once again a potential barrier to solidarity among progressive activists.

Puar and Rai contended that the creation of a terrorist-monster was contingent on the queerness of the subject being made monster. This creation was accomplished through two sequential moves. First, the idea of the terrorist was constructed on the idea of sexual perversity, often through “failed heterosexuality, Western notions of the psyche, and a certain queer monstrosity” (2002, p. 117). Second, aggressive heteronormative patriotism arose in response to the monster-terrorist-fag. This was seen through media
representation and the enactment of hypermasculine adherence to a 'Merican\(^{37}\) culture. While Puar and Rai wrote immediately after 9/11 about the moment the monstrosity was created, this monstrous representation and the aggressive responses to it are active in the Trump era as well. The imagining and creation of a monster serve to produce fear. To challenge this creation is to choose the side of the monster, the side of fear, and thus, the terrorist. Binding critique of the representation, and of aggressive political and state response to it, to anti-American/pro-terrorist positions is a false equivalency that reflects “a hegemonic struggle [that] is being waged through the exclusionary and normative idioms of patriotism, humanitarianism, and yes, even feminism” (Puar & Rai, 2002, p. 127).

Emotions are a large component of contemporary political discourse. Fear is a great motivator to give up democratically earned rights, as seen in such actions as the passing of the Patriot Act, which was reauthorized as recently as 2011 by President Barack Obama and renewed with a new act known as the USA Freedom Act, extending these violations of our rights into at least 2019 (Byers, 2015; Puar & Rai, 2002)

If you imagine the future as always full of threats, you are never wrong; even if there is no threat actively looming, “it will have been real because it was felt to be real” (Massumi, 2010, p. 53). Massumi asserted that, “what is not actually real can be felt into being” (2010, p. 54). In the United States, this was perhaps seen in the xenophobic backlash against people with refugee status when Trump wanted to reduce the number of

\(^{37}\) An alternate spelling of “American,” used often to emphasize an American stereotypical experience at the expense of those deemed not-'Merican.
refugee visas (Holland, 2017; United Nations, 2017). While no data support the idea that people with refugee status are dangerous, xenophobic actors, right-wing media, and conservative politicians produce and disseminate disinformation that causes fear of refugees in the populace. The Trump regime even rejected evidence to the contrary in a Department of Health and Human Services study, which documented that refugees brought in $63 billion more in governmental revenue than what they cost (Hirschfeld Davis & Sengupta, 2017). The feeling of danger or fear is no less real than the danger or fear someone feels when physically faced with a dangerous situation, yet in the former case, the dangerous situation is one the state has manufactured to manipulate the body politic.

This creates a populace governed by a governmentality of fear. This fear may be of something real or imagined. If to understand that the deployment of fear by the state is to recognize how fear has been made “into the foundation of sovereignty, this is because it is the feeling that maximizes not only the identification between individual and collective interests, but which also accomplishes an identification between interests and values” (Rancière & Corcoran, 2010, p. 107). A government can change the emotion from an expectation of reward to an expectation of punishment (Marcus, 2000). Emotion, particularly in its manifestation as fear, has played a major role in the reinscription of nationalistic and xenophobic ideas since 9/11.

The alignment of the body politic’s interests, values, and identity has long been a catalyst for nationalism as a means of control (Berlant, 2004). Emotions help “align some subjects with some others and against other others” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 117). Emotions
help glue individuals together in a collective. Ahmed (2004) posited that emotions often take the form of withness, premised on likeness—the feeling that one is with others and not with some others. The others one is “with” share values such as “freedom, love, and compassion” that involve a “defense of particular institutional and social forms against the danger posed by others” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 134).

This rejection of alterity served as a catalyst for nationalism immediately following 9/11. Nationalism was incited through state stimulation of White anger and rage “at being made to feel constrained in the treatment of historical minorities: if we are all, more than ever, Americans, why do the subalterns and liberals insist on creating fissures that need not be there?” (Berlant, 2004, p. 70). The challenge to the hegemony of the state that began during the presidency of George W. Bush, with added complexities and divisions in the eyes of dominant communities during the contemporary War on Terror, has been reignited under Donald Trump. These complexities take the form of complicating identity and representation for equity, which have come to be “misrepresented as an elite movement in contrast to the vernacularity of Anglo-American supremacy” (Berlant, 2004, p. 70).

This misidentification as an “elite movement” may have complicated identity for some, but was intentional for others. An in-group identity is a way to bind people together with mutual respect, which comes from knowing one another. It also, however, serves to create fissures between the groups engaging in activism, such as the teddy bear-droppers (Sørensen, 2017), and those in power and their supporters. Such fissures signify
oppositional inclusion/exclusion criteria—if you are not with us, you are against us (Ahmed, 2004; Berlant, 2004; Puar & Rai, 2002).

Politics relies upon emotional deployment (Polletta et al., 2001). This was most recently seen in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Right-wing hate groups, for instance, rely upon emotions of love to garner support (Ahmed, 2004). Surprisingly, these groups do not always deploy a message of hate, but rather a message of love gilding hate of the other. For example, Ahmed (2004) documented the web presence of the Aryan Nation, which calls out for White solidarity, consequently positioning the other as outsider. Ahmed argues that from the perspective of the Aryan Nation, it is not hate, but love for themselves as Whites, that invites action. Ahmed’s example connects to the idea of conatus. The Aryan Nation has taken up self-preservation through (the guise of), for some, White love, positioned for others as White supremacy.

The state deployment of emotion is a global phenomenon shaping three major political moments in the contemporary West: (a) Great Britain’s vote to remove itself from the European Union, known as Brexit; (b) the 2016 U.S. presidential election; and (c) the 2017 French election (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). In all three political moments, right-wing White nationalism has taken the stage to help shape politics (Friedman, 2017; Giroux, 2017b; Inglehart & Norris, 2016). Nationalism “draws heavily on the emotions of attachment to the ‘place’ of the nation” (Woods et al., 2012, p. 572).

Anxiety.

Fear is not the only emotion that plays a role in politics. At least one study explores the role anxiety plays. In a 2015 study, researchers removed politics from their
analysis to see if anxiety unrelated to politics had an impact on the choice to vote (Renshon et al., 2015). The researchers explained how certain types of negative emotions, unrelated to specific groups, may cause prejudiced behavior. They illustrated that people who had recently had an anxiety-related experience were more likely to have negative perceptions of immigration and immigrants, even if the experience was unrelated to immigration (Renshon et al., 2015). Individuals with higher levels of anxiety were “more likely to interpret ambiguous information in a negative, threatening manner” (Renshon et al., 2015, p. 581).

Similarly, Song (2017) found that some individuals who experienced more fear or anger in their daily lives were likely to read only the news that confirmed their beliefs (proattitudinal), thus further entrenching their anxieties. Song analyzed American National Election studies data and discovered that fear and anger significantly increased proattitudinal news exposure. While “theorists have long contended that more balanced exposure is vital for a healthy functioning democracy, studies often show that news programs … exhibit a relatively strong ideological bias” (Song, 2017, p. 64). Song cross-examined a question regarding how often the participant felt afraid, angry, proud, or hopeful and their self-reported likelihood of voting for the Republican or Democratic presidential candidate. Song measured participants’ assumed political leanings by asking which of a list of 30 news shows and networks they watched or listened to and how often. These spanned CNN, MSNBC, All Things Considered, and The Washington Post on the left and Fox News, The O’Reilly Factor, Glenn Beck, and The Wall Street Journal on the right.
Song found that right-leaning participants were “more likely to avoid counterattitudinal partisan news programs as a function of fear” (2017, p. 58) of challenging their bias. Song suggested that emotions have a strong correlational relationship to political identity and argued that fear and anxiety were exhibited by more right-leaning individuals; left-leaning individuals had a higher incidence of hope and pride. Song (2017) found that left-leaning individuals had no significant aversion based on fear or anxiety. Moreover, Song found that most people consume a balanced media diet, but “a relatively stable and discernable partisan difference, especially regarding the avoidance-oriented behaviors of Republicans, may be an indication that not all people are equally exposed to opposing viewpoints in their day-to-day media diet” (2017, p. 64).

According to Berlant, we exist in a “post-traumatic” reality, one in which the majority of the adult populace “looks back on a time of moral innocence” (Berlant, 2004, p. 73), and in doing so supports the discourse of sentimentality deployed by the state, promising a return to an era that was never as innocent as imagined. Politicians use the “compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place” (Derrida & Prenowitz, 1995, p. 57) as a call to nationalism. This compulsive desire is both natural and unattainable (Cvetkovich, 2003; Derrida & Prenowitz, 1995).

**Queer Theory and Methodological Choices**

Researchers employing queer methods engage in the challenge of power, using “methods strategically, that is, as resources for understanding and for producing resistances to local structures of domination” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012, p. 29).
Epistemologically speaking, queer theorists privilege the experiential knowledge of the marginalized (Gamson, 2000). Queer theorists challenge educators and researchers to interrogate knowledge as it is produced to bring to light the impact that power relations have had on this generation of knowledge. Queer theorists challenge us to deconstruct the evidence to see if it supports or challenges our truth claims.

Queer methodology is a “scavenger methodology” in which researchers use seemingly disparate methods to “collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 13). A queer approach to a methodology “attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 13).

What I find most productive about queer theory is the confluence of critical and poststructural approaches, and queer theory’s potential generativity in practice methodologically. In this section, I detail a brief history of queer theory and examine its influence on my research topic and methodological design.

“My, That Theory Is a Bit Queer,” or the Origins of a Theory

Queer theorists entered the academic discourse in the early 1990s with a conference titled “Queer Theory,” held at the University of California, Santa Cruz and chaired by Teresa de Lauretis, whose research focused on cultural studies and semiotics (Duong, 2012). While this conference marked one of the first public academic conversation on queer theory, to call it the start of queer theory would be disingenuous.
A conference clearly cannot be the beginning of something; the notion of a conference suggests that conversations on the subject were already ongoing.

The earliest queer theory arose from the intersection of literary theory and feminist theory, and among the attendees of the 1990 conference. Two books published that same year were seen as germinal texts for the field; Butler (1990/2006) wrote *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, and Sedgwick (1990/2008) wrote *Epistemology of the Closet*. While *Gender Trouble* primarily disturbed our notions of gender and its perceived binary (men and women), *Epistemology of the Closet* focused on sexuality. In it, Sedgwick challenged the binary notion of sexuality as heterosexual and homosexual and described how the binary underpins all relations in Western culture. For Sedgwick (2008), any analysis of modern Western culture is insufficient unless it assesses the impact of sexuality. The supposed binary of heterosexual and homosexual is a form of hegemony, and as such damages our culture. The damage is done without the consent of the people being hurt, and often without their knowledge, particularly if they have not had oppressive experiences based on maintenance of a binary.

In the field of queer theory, scholars are suspicious of all dualities and argue for the “plurality and irreducibility” (Walters, 1996, p. 836) of the subject. Queer theory is also a largely deconstructive paradigm, taking “social constructionist insights and forcefully add[ing] a poststructuralist critique of the unified, autonomous self” (Gamson, 2000, p. 348). While the beginning of queer theory relied heavily on sexuality and gender as primary centers of deconstruction—famously in the work of Butler (2006) and
Sedgwick (2008)—more recent work by Stockton (2004) emphasized the notion of elasticity.

Stockton (2004) framed queerness as elastic or as an analogue to “abnormality” or “strangeness” (p. 282). I begin with queerness as a choice to transgress normalizing regimes, and I follow this line of argumentation and application in my research (Anzaldúa, 2010; Warner, 1993). I agree with Sedgwick’s (2008) argument that an “understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance” (p. 1) if it does not include a critical understanding of sexuality in its analysis; and I agree with her argument that sexuality is part of understandings of culture and queerness. But in this research, I focus on queerness as a transgression of hegemonic logics (Gamson, 2000; Warner, 1993). That is, I stretch the notion of queerness in a contemporary context to include the challenge these logics pose (whether intentionally or otherwise) to what Puar and Rai (2002) name a queered subjectivity. I seek to understand subjectivities that have been targeted by the Trump regime (Dreamers, immigrants, LGB people, people of color, poor people, people with refugee status, trans individuals, women, and others38). I recognize that these are not distinct categories, and perhaps are not inclusive of all the groups targeted by the Trump regime. Central to the analyses of this project is understanding how millennials are responding to the reinvigorated targeting of these groups.

38 This is not to say that these groups have not been targeted before, but that in this era a renewed and reinvigorated public attack on these identities has taken place, as I have addressed in Chapter 1.
Queer theorists have their own take on ontology, or the nature or essence of how one experiences the world (Mason, 2002). As queer theory is anti-universalist and anti-essentialist, there are multiple queer ontologies. Some similarities exist in the unified understanding of the “discursive or symbolic dimensions of the social” (Hennessy, 1993, p. 965). An ontology of queer theory would have some commitments to a materialist realism, adhering to the idea that material differences constitute reality (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2012) and paying specific attention to identities and the impact they have. In the end, however, a queered ontology uses its epistemology to challenge the normative regimes that enforce cultural homogenization (de Lauretis, 1991; Warner, 1993).

Since the early 1990s, queer theory has been adopted by scholars across a multitude of disciplines, such as education (Pinar, 1998), sociology (Pfeffer, 2014; Seidman, 1996), and geography (Bain, Payne, & Isen, 2015), in order to further engage and interrogate aspects of power and domination. Queer theory in education has been deployed in various ways, from an additive (“add sexuality and stir”) approach, looking simply for representation rather than participation (J. D. Anderson, 2013; Dwyer, 2011; Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2011; Norris, 2014; Renn, 2007), to a robust interrogation of power structures (Leck, 2000; Mayo, 2007; Pascoe, 2011; Rofes, 2000). Queer theory did not appear in educational research until relatively recently, perhaps because of the conservative nature of our field (Abustan & Rud, 2016; M. W. Apple, 2014). Queer theorists have taken up various issues in education, including school uniforms (Leck, 2000), openly queer teachers (Rofes, 2000), curriculum (Pinar, 1998), and the role of allies (Abustan & Rud, 2016). Muñoz (2009) argued that queer theory must never settle for the here and now. As I consider what is on the horizon for this paradigm within
education, I document in this project the ways queer theory has affected my orientation to my research topic and methodology.

**Queer Theory’s Influence on Ideas of Activism, Resistance, and Emotion**

Queer theory has a storied past with activism and emotion (Pennell, 2016). Queer theorists engage with curriculum theory to help guide and aid preservice teachers through “crisis, uncertainty, healing, and activism” (Pennell, 2016, p. 243). Queer theorists encourage scholar-activists to move beyond a deficit model of education, focusing not only on the challenges of particular identities, but also on the opportunities and strengths of these identities (Pennell, 2016). While queer theory’s entre into education scholarship may have been delayed compared with its entre into literary theory, it has made its way into our field (Abustan & Rud, 2016). Murphy and Lugg (2016a) argued the status of queer theory in education is largely due to the devotion to more-traditional social science research methods, the precarious nature of queer methodologies, and homophobia in education.

Queer theory also has a long history of connection to emotions and affects. Much of the connection originates from the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and is rooted in work on loss and trauma (Cvetkovich, 2003; Eng & Kazanjian, 2002). Ahmed (2014) contended that emotions are cultural practices and are part of an iterative chain that gives them meanings. For Ahmed, emotions have no meaning outside the cultural context from which they originate and to which they belong. Ahmed’s idea draws on the importance placed on signs and signifiers in poststructural inquiry. The social organization of
emotions is key to understanding how emotions shape communities and the bodies that constitute a community.

To engage in emotional work involves an affective process of gathering data dependent on the “sensory involvement which, in an attempt to convey and make some sense of embodied experience, takes emotions and feelings seriously” (Rooke, 2009, p. 151). Whereas some have tried to remove emotions from research (Goodwin et al., 2001; Weber, 1978), engaging with the reflexivity and subjectivity of emotions is a crucial part of queer research (Rooke, 2009). Examining the power of emotion helps us “question the way in which the ontological and epistemological boundary between the ‘knower’ and the ‘known’ is produced and maintained in the discursive production of ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Rooke, 2009, p. 153). Due to the centrality of questioning and defying binarisms in queer theory (Butler, 2006; de Lauretis, 1991; Sedgwick, 2008; Warner, 1993), I argue that recognizing the importance of emotion is a natural evolution of the project of binary destruction.

The history of resistance within the queer theoretical landscape is written into its inception. Having its origin in the experiences of homophobia from the 1970s through the 1990s (Abustan & Rud, 2016), when the first conference on queer theory was held (de Lauretis, 1991), queer theory and queerness have always been about a resistance to normalization (Warner, 1993). This resistance has taken shape in many fields and in many ways. Queer researchers have taken up gender (Butler, 1990/2006, 2011; Halberstam, 1998), sexuality (Halberstam, 2005; Pascoe, 2011; Sedgwick, 2008), education (Leck, 2000; Pinar, 1998), time (Dinshaw et al., 2007; Freeman, 2010; Puar,
2005), nationalism (Puar, 2007), race and racism (Johnson, 2016; J. E. Muñoz, 2009; Puar & Rai, 2002), the law (Spade, 2015), and the centrality of heterosexuality to culture (Duggan, 2004). In each of these instances, queerness has been framed as an oppositional method and identity, resisting majoritarian (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) narrativizing structures. Researchers using queer theory have developed a set of tools to use in their work. These tools accept difference not as a deficit, but as a strength. This acceptance allows a pastiche of methods and thoughts to come together to form new research methods (Abustan & Rud, 2016; Halberstam, 1998).

**Queer Theory’s Influence on Ideas of Method**

Historical forms of social science research used a positivist approach; researchers needed to be able to explain, predict, and control the subject in order for their research to be considered valid and reliable (Lincoln et al., 2011). With the linguistic turn or discursive turn (Butler, 2011; Derrida, 2016; Foucault, 1995; Irigaray, 1985; Kristeva, 1982), many social science researchers began questioning claims of objectivity, truth, and validity (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991, 2008; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Koro-Ljungberg, 2010; Lather, 1986; Lincoln et al., 2011).

This questioning of objectivity, truth, and validity comes out of a postmodern paradigm of research, arising from a historical moment often described as the paradigm wars (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012). These separate wars of paradigms helped establish postpositivism in contrast and response to positivism. Denzin and Lincoln (2012) identified four general research paradigms in qualitative research, including positivist and postpositive paradigms, critical paradigms, and the postmodern schools: constructivist-
interpretive and feminist-poststructural. Positivist and postpositivist paradigms work from within “a realist and critical realist ontology and objective epistemologies” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012, p. 27), while the constructivist-interpretive school maintains that ontology and epistemology are relative and subjective. A critical theorist believes in an ontology that is based in historical realism, a struggle for power, and a belief that knowledge created is to be used for liberatory praxis (Lincoln et al., 2011).

I agree with some postmodern researchers, who have argued that positivist methods “reproduce only a certain kind of science, a science that silences too many voices” and that researchers must be able to evaluate research on other criteria such as “verisimilitude, emotionality, personal responsibility, an ethic of caring, political praxis, multivoiced texts, dialogues with subjects, and so on” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012, p. 19). Specifically, I come from a queer perspective, one that does not always play nice with the normal academy (Plummer, 2013). I believed that a queer perspective and possible analyses will be productive as I explicitly study the emotionality of millennial voices. While these perspectives are important, and add another layer from which to analyze the data, I found that a queer perspective not as generative as I had thought. I discuss this more in Chapter 6.

It was critical theory that began to allow researchers to have conversations about situatedness and the socially constructed nature of so-called reality and knowledge (Haraway, 1988). This notion of situated knowledge represents an understanding that knowledge itself is socially constructed and morphs depending on the space from which one views the world (Haraway, 1988). Social constructivists taught that the “ideological
doctrine of the scientific method and all the philosophical verbiage about epistemology were cooked up to distract our attention from getting to know the world effectively” (Haraway, 1988, p. 577). According to Haraway (1988), if researchers adhere to (and do not push past) what could be considered a “Truth,” they will only ever have a partial perspective, one that complements the White heterosexual male perspective that still dominates the sciences. Haraway’s notion of situated knowledge and standpoint allowed researchers to produce research that positioned knowledge and truth as partial. This partiality is the feminist objectivity, one that is about “limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object” (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). A partial and situated position in research also demands that researchers answer for what “we learn to see” (Haraway, 1988, p. 583).

Critical research designs involve research that is transformative; researchers interrogate power, question themselves as liberators, and foreground the tensions inherent in speaking for a community rather than with it (Lather, 2003). Critical theorists included neo-Marxist and liberal feminists, who paid close attention to the situatedness of women, femininity, and a gendered body (Butler, 2006; Lincoln et al., 2011). Critical researchers understand that power influences all interactions and relationships (Kilgore, 2001). This power may be race, or gender, or class. For feminist perspectives that come from a critical perspective, power comes in the form of patriarchy or the hegemony of the masculine. This notion of the universalizing experience of the patriarchy and the essentialism embedded in it gave rise to queer theory. While feminine-experienced individuals still face the hegemony of the masculine, queer theorists troubled a universalized notion of power being related to one aspect of hegemony.
Queer theory responded to essentialism in feminist theory, challenging the gender and sex binaries that were, and often still are, found in feminist theory. Queer theory is seen in its academic manifestations “as a response to a certain kind of feminist and lesbian theorizing” (Walters, 1996, p. 842). Identity politics of the 1990s “suppose[ed] a unity, squeezing out difference, perpetuating binarisms and dichotomous formations, and bordering on (if not instantiating) essentialism” (Walters, 1996, p. 839). Queer theory developed, in part, to reject binarisms and dichotomous formations.

What purpose does a binary approach to gender serve? “If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes,” then we must allow alternatives to the “stability of binary sex” to develop as such. A “presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it” (Butler, 2006, p. 9). The idea of such adherence to strict gender binaries calls into question the woman/man dichotomy, and whom the dichotomy serves. If de Beauvoir (2011) is correct that one is not born a woman but is under the “cultural compulsion to become one” (Butler, 2006, p. 11), then logic assumes an “other”-gendered body would be subsumed by the culture that demands its othering (Sedgwick, 2008). This extrapolation, coming from feminism, would apply not just to women, but to any body that falls outside a prescribed or expected iteration—anyone enacting a queered body. Thus, any queered body represents a restricted iteration of gender that is subject to the patriarchal gaze (Butler, 2011).

Heavily influenced by poststructuralism, queer theorists have challenged binaries that exist in language and experiences. Queerness is a marker of the “instability of
identity” and focuses “not so much on specific populations as on sexual categorization processes and their deconstruction” (Gamson, 2000, p. 349). Queer theory brings “poststructuralist and post-modernist concerns to the forefront – critiques of identity and identity politics, an emphasis on discourse and its deconstruction, a suspicion of ‘grand narratives’” (Gamson, 2000, p. 354). It is these concerns that push us to understand the amorphous nature of knowledge and so-called reality.

Concurrently, queer theorists critiqued the ways “‘science’ has been used against the marginalized” and intersected this critique with queer researchers who were “particularly comfortable with the strategies of qualitative research – which at least appear to be less objectifying of their subjects” (Gamson, 2000, p. 347). Sedgwick (2008) argued that we have long had binary oppositions of identity in our culture, and that the two parts of each binary have never been equal. She deconstructed binaries to show how “term B is not symmetrical with but subordinated to term A” (Sedgwick, 2008, p. 10). These groupings exist in many forms of identity, and in all of them, one group is valorized and subsumes the other.

I believe that when identities are left on the margins and not even recognized in these dualisms, they cannot be a part of a conversation or culture, and thus, they go unrecognized. This idea is imperative in this project, as the queered subjectivities that constitute the vocalities of this project were the ones left unrecognized and on the margins. Some agency was achieved for various communities in the 20th century, but under the Trump regime attacks on targeted identities have been renewed. Millennial youth came of age during a time when recognition occurred in law (through the passage
and eventual overturn of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” through marriage equality, and through Black Lives Matter protests) and media (Orange Is the New Black, Brokeback Mountain, Modern Family, Martin). But visibility is a trap (Bersani, 1987; Foucault, 1995).

While Foucault (1987) names that visibility is a trap, it does not stop this from being true. This was particularly present for two of the artists who wanted to engage in more activism, but due to their employment, could not (see Chapter 5). These two, and many others are simply trying to exist as queer subjects in non-queer spaces. To that end, being visible is a risk, and it is one that is asked of those who are often most at risk. Queer subjects are tasked with creating their own spaces in worlds that were not created for them (Weiser and Wagner, 2017; Ahmed, 2015). When this occurs, these communities engage and become part of a precariat, those who are at risk of losing their livelihoods to challenge the hegemony of a white cisheteropatriarchal regime (Adsit, et al, 2015).

Queer theorists’ concern with power, culture, and making room for marginalized voices is what created and has sustained the field (Gamson, 2000; Murphy & Lugg, 2016). Queer theory’s encouragement of the deconstruction of binaries forces me to interrogate my role(s) as activist-scholar. Like Villenas (1996), I have come to know myself as both inside and outside the communities I work with. I often find myself in communities where I am the only one of my identity, a rare occurrence for a White masc person. I also find myself in communities with White masculine folks who make administrative decisions at SCPWI.
As Jose Esteban Muñoz (2009) illustrated, queerness is the not-yet-here. Queerness persuades me to never settle, to always be the killjoy (Ahmed, 2017), a figure who prevents happiness “by not being made happy by the right things” or “at the right moments” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 53), and to “ruin what ruins” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 40). I believe that we need more killjoys in education, to challenge norms that have been long established. This upsetting of the status quo will certainly disturb many individuals, but I believe it is necessary in order to create an education praxis of equity. Queer researchers continue to press and are never satisfied, a position that is commensurate with my role as an activist-scholar.

**Theoretical Tensions**

As I use queer theory in this study, I recognize the inherent tensions in naming a subjectivity as queer. As mentioned above, I lean upon Stockton (2004) to frame queerness as elastic, and as resistance to normativizing regimes (Warner, 1993). While I read queerness into the agency of the artists with whom I am collaborating for this project, that might not be how they name their subjectivity. Foremost, I am interested in the ways they have characterized their own experiences. In this project, I use queerness to transgress logics of White supremacy, nativism, misogyny, and the other various forms of oppression that have been named throughout this work (Gamson, 2000; Warner, 1993). Therefore, while I attend to the named subjectivity that has arisen from my collaborators,
I also argue that it is a queered subjectivity that they must adopt at least tactically in order to challenge the hegemonies of the Trump regime (Puar & Rai, 2002).

**Summary**

This chapter began by looking at the role of activist-scholars in the academy, and the challenges and struggles that they not only face but also embody through this work. From there I explored the role of emotions and affect, putting particular focus on how these are manifested in political and activist spaces. This was followed by an exploration of the role of activists on university campuses. I began to explore the role of new media, particularly how it is used to create community and dialogue, in the formation of activism. Then, I laid out my understanding of queer theory, and how I see it having a role in educational research. Together, all of this contributes to my understanding of my study, in which I determine how contemporary activists experience emotion.

Researchers who utilize methodologies that align most closely with an activist philosophy are situated in some of the most precarious research agendas (Hale, 2001; Pulido, 2008). This is for two primary reasons. First, activist research may be in misalignment with the institution itself. For activist academics, “a move to activism occurs when research fractures the very ideologies that justify power inequities” (Fine, 1994, p. 24). Critiquing institutional power is something that is crucial to activist research but may challenge the very ground in which it originates and is produced. Second, researchers aligned closely with activist-based power structures, such as distributed power structures, leave part of the research agenda to the leadership of the community that is collaborating on the project. This may help ensure that power is distributed
between the academic and the community (Lincoln et al., 2011). Due to this shared responsibility, the very livelihood of the scholar-activist is put on the line as a member of the precariat (Adsit et al., 2015). I believe, had I been working full-time at SCPWI as a student affairs administrator, my livelihood may have been at risk. As I began as only a student several months ago, I don’t believe that through this project I was a member of an ideological precariat. While no relationship exists outside relations of force (Foucault, 1978, 1980), commitments to collaborative efforts in the practice of research often have more diffused power structures, compared with other paradigms of research. In Chapter 3 I address my choices of approach, design, and methodology.
CHAPTER 3 : METHODS

In this chapter, I situate myself and this study in the world. I do this through an exploration of my ontological grounding, my epistemological commitments, my methods and the methodology of the study, and my positionality. As this project used arts-based research (ABR), I provide a cursory introduction to the use of ABR, share ways this research approach has been used, and introduce zines as the frame for my study. I follow with a rationale of why this methodology works for this project. Finally, I explore the theoretical groundings and commitments that I hold in this project.

Also, I describe the aim of this study in relation to my theoretical commitments, with an eye to the implications of this project and how it might be used in education in general—higher education in specific. I explore the sources of the data in the project, how I obtained data, and how I analyzed it. I present issues of validity as well as the subject of confidentiality. I close with a discussion of the significance I think this study will have for educators and activists alike and a reflection of the strengths and limitations of my project.

The Nature of My Project

In this project, I attempted to understand, through the creation of a series of collaborative art sessions, the experiences and articulations of young adult activists. I chose to call these meetings collaborative art sessions purposefully, as they were not focus groups in a traditional sense, as so little verbal communication happened the first
time. Further, the art, rather than dialogue, served as the crux from which communication hinged. I use arts-based research as a means to better understand and explore this subject in these politically contentious times. Because ABR “values nonhierarchical relationships” (Leavy, 2017, p. 10), it resonates with my collaborative commitments as well as with my commitment to engaging in a collaborative research informed by Marxist critical theory and feminism to “demand that research contribute to the political struggles of oppressed groups” and as “democracy and the belief that those committed to that goal must exemplify their commitment to it in the practice of research” (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1993, p. 254).

Given that I pursued understandings about the role of resistance to the rise and national positioning of White supremacist, nativist, cisheteropatriarchal, and anti-environmental politics, ABR was particularly productive. ABR is “often useful in studies involving identity work” and in projects to “confront stereotypes that keep some groups disenfranchised” and has the potential “to jar people into seeing and thinking differently” (Leavy, 2017, p. 10). By engaging with participants in the artistic representation of the political body, I intended for us to speak back to the power that functions upon that body, to “explore and expose it and welcome the opportunity to subvert it in the name of social justice” (Pelias, 2007, p. 188).

Further, collaborative research is productive for this project because it aims to “unravel, critically, the blurred boundaries in our relation” and to “imagine how our practice can be transformed to resist, self-consciously, acts of othering” (Fine, 1993a, p. 75). Collaborative projects resist and subvert the boundary between self and other, as
there is no “simple binary opposition of Self and Other” (Fine, 1993a, p. 75).
Collaborative research is not a matter of professional researchers working together, but of working in community and solidarity with those who have been impacted by systems of oppression. Collaborative perspective emphasizes “context for interaction among those involved in the research collaboration” (Michael Angrosino, 2005, p. 732).

Specifically, I am interested in the production of art in the form of zines that explore activism and resistance. The word *zine*, short for *fanzine*, is a portmanteau of *fan* and *magazine* (Lovata, 2007). Zines “are independently produced magazines” that exist “in a format unconstrained by commercial or organizational restrictions” (Bell, 2002, p. 188) and thus, have long been used as a means of expression in nondominant communities, including feminist, punk, and do-it-yourself (DIY) subcultures (B. L.-A. Bell, 2002; Comstock, 2001; Duncombe, 2008; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004; Lovata, 2007).

**Zines**

Zines present an opportunity for educational researchers interested in qualitative research designs that are subversive and outside the mainstream (Lovata, 2007). Zines, like queer theory, are amorphous in their construction and content, eschewing standardization and guidelines (Abustan & Rud, 2016). To that end, they can be created in any image that the artist(s) or zinester(s) wish. Lovata (2007) described zines as a form of cultural representation and a means by which to create and disseminate knowledge that falls beyond the bounds of normative discourse. This knowledge resists a standardized narrative by presenting alternative discourses. The format of a zine is also productive and
appealing in research design. Additionally, Holm (2010) argued that visual forms of research are becoming more common due to a broader appeal and are thus more likely to be forms with which audiences engage.

Guzetti and Gamboa (2004) framed the production of zines as an exploration of literacy as a social practice in helping young women find their voice. The visual representations, they argued, literally “form and represent their identities. Hence, literacy work is identity work” (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004, p. 413). Their study involved the creation of a zine made by their students rather than a metanalysis of already-made zines. Guzetti and Gamboa, a professor and a high school teacher, looked at the inspiration for the creation of the zines, the letters “from readers requesting copies and giving feedback” (2004, p. 415), and photographs of the rooms in which the zine—titled Burnt Beauty—was produced. They also gathered data using a questionnaire provided to the readers of the zine. They analyzed three primary areas: the zine, the zinesters (authors), and the content of the zines. The study centered on the development of literacy skills through the production of zines. A secondary component was the exploration of how young female zinesters began to find their voice through the artistic manifestation of these zines.

The most comprehensive study of zines comes from Stephen Duncombe’s (2008) text, Notes From the Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture. In this text, Duncombe contended that zines are defiant forms of artistic engagement in a world built on capitalist consumption. Zines are a form of literature that is outside the bounds of the capitalist status quo. Zines are in “opposition to the aboveground world, today the ubiquity of mass consumption characterizes mainstream society” (Duncombe, 2008, p. 107).
According to Duncombe (2008), zines are individualized and not made for mass distribution. Zines are a form of participatory culture, and through their creation and dissemination represent the interplay of art and knowledge. Duncombe’s text is a retrospective of the forms of zines, their history, and common themes and topics of the form, but it is also a guide on research creating zines. Research using zines has focused on the end product, rather than on the act of zine creation. It seems that the production of a zine has not been used as a method of research.

As such, in my project, zines were both methodology and data. They served as a crux from which to try and build community and relationships, and also served as data to analyze the experiences of activism in which these millennials engage. As I discuss in Chapter 6, this served as a unique contribution methodologically, which benefits researchers and also helped to build community and relationships.

**Arts-Based Research**

Arts-based researchers who focus on the visual nature of representation search “for ways to utilize visual arts in studying the human experience in more complex ways” (Holm, Sahlstrom, & Zilliacus, 2017, p. 311). This form of research draws from visual sociology and visual anthropology (Holm, Sahlstrom, & Zilliacus, 2017). Holm et al. (2017) represented ABR on a continuum, with one end constituting a strictly art-centered approach, intertwining the creation of art with research, and the other end reflecting the use of art as an artifact toward research ends (for example, as useful data, or ABR as a useful methodological tool). I see art and its creation as a useful tool to “enlarge human understanding” (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 8) and to foster and solidify “an empathic
participation in the lives of others and in the situations studied” (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 9).

Arts-based research allows us to not “draw near certain conclusions about states of affairs that generalize, but rather to secure technologies of mind that will enable us to peer more deeply into situations that might not be the same as the one that we study” (Eisner, 2007, p. 20). ABR can serve to deepen our knowledge and understanding of the world; it is messy, literally and figuratively (Eisner, 2007; Leavy, 2017). I engage in this project fully cognizant that a road map for the particular form that I intend this research to take does not exist; instead, I must create a map with participants as artists in order to find my way.

Get Lost

Queer theory (Adams & Holman Jones, 2011; B. L.-A. Bell, 2002; Gamson, 2000; Helmer, 2016; Murphy & Lugg, 2016b) provides a rationale for the use of zines as the frame of my project. “Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality” (J. E. Muñoz, 2009, p. 1). We exist in a world illumined by a warm horizon “imbued with potentiality” (J. E. Muñoz, 2009, p. 1). Queer theory has a long lineage within education, but education is both queer and not yet queer (Pinar, 2007). Education has not fully accepted its role as a queer space, yet is marked as queer in the minds of the powerful (Pinar, 2007). Education has the potential to become queer, to challenge the notions of the normative regime (Warner, 1993). I believe that educators/researchers must be willing to get lost. To get lost is to recognize the “fertile ontological space and ethical practice in asking how research-based knowledge remains possible after so much
questioning of the very ground of science” (Lather, 2007, p. viii). In this project, I queer ideas of what knowledge may be and also of which knowledges are valid (Jaggar, 1989; Rooke, 2009).

Moreover, to accept this notion of becoming lost is to accept our own queerness as educators and “the way in which one’s queerness will always render one lost to a world of heterosexual imperatives, codes, and laws. To accept loss is to accept queerness — or more accurately, to accept the loss of heteronormativity, authorization, and entitlement” (J. E. Muñoz, 2009, p. 73). Scholars are afraid of loss and failure, but we must remember that failure can be a generative act if looked at queerly (Halberstam, 2011). In getting lost, in losing our way, “we find another way of making meaning in which … no one gets left behind” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 25). I identify as an activist-scholar (Villenas, 1996), one who navigates spaces and places where I feel both at home and lost, often simultaneously. Here I “push the borders of the multiple, decentered, and politicized self as researcher” (Villenas, 1996, p. 714) as both privileged (White, masc, able-bodied, middle-class, etc.) and targeted (queer, etc.). I believe that activist-scholars must first get lost to embrace our queer way to justice and reclaim education’s queer potential.

It is from a “shared critical dissatisfaction [that] we arrive at collective potentiality” (J. E. Muñoz, 2009, p. 189), and collective potentiality is at the core of this project. I name collective potentiality as the ability of educators to work collaboratively, with one another and with students, toward an educational practice that is liberatory for all students. Through a shared critical dissatisfaction, alliances—sometimes unusual
alliances—can access this collective potentiality. As educators, we must get lost in the collective potentiality of the nuance, of the generative nature of the particularities that scare us (Halberstam, 2011). We may fail, and we may gain nothing, critical educators who express a hope for liberation must focus not on ourselves, but on our hope for what is on the horizon (J. E. Muñoz, 2009). Using the power and privilege we have as educators, we can leverage our potential to work in community to challenge oppressive normative regimes. To fail to challenge the traditional silencing of voices and discourses that is so entrenched in our schools it has become part of the hidden curriculum (M. Apple & King, 1977) means that we have already failed to use education as a liberatory tool.

As someone who identifies as a scholar-activist, I believe that I must work in concert with communities to counter oppressive normative regimes and actively accept, seek out, and share counter-narratives (Delgado, 2000; Helmer, 2016; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), and to embody the killjoy (Ahmed, 2017). To accomplish all of this, I turn to both queer theory (Gamson, 2000; Hammers & Brown III, 2004; Murphy & Lugg, 2016b; Pinar, 1998) and critical theory (Gannon & Davies, 2012; Kilgore, 2001; Lather, 2003; Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004) to navigate the effects of such dominance of these regimes.

But I believe that failure can be generative, and that activist-scholars ought to learn from our mistakes. In part, this means we should begin to transform schools into places “to question, explore, and seek alternative explanations” (Meyer, 2007, p. 27) rather than places in which children are treated as empty vessels or as automatons for
reproducing culture and performing labor. Indeed, the risk of failure represents the potentiality to “spark new ways of perceiving and acting on a reality that is itself potentially changeable” (J. E. Muñoz, 2009, p. 135). Researchers and educators must be willing to be vulnerable, to share ourselves with our students, to learn with them, to be student/teachers and teacher/students, and to disrupt unproductive binaries that reify dominant narratives (Freire, 2000). More than anything, we have to be willing to “embrace the absurd, the silly, and the hopelessly goofy. Rather than resisting endings and limits, let us instead revel in and cleave to all of our own inevitable fantastic failures” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 187). Stockton (2004, 2009) argued that children have had experience of being queered in some way, as childhood is a decidedly queer time in our lives, a time in which we have no agency and are made queer through our innocence. By getting lost and finding our silly, we can re-become our queer youth to re-engage with students and challenge notions of normativity that hurt a queered subjectivity.

**Deductive, Inductive, Abductive**

In general, qualitative research projects are inductive rather than deductive (Glesne, 2015). Inductive approaches move from the specific to the general, “mucking around for ideas and hunches in the data rather than deriving those hypotheses in the first instance from established theory” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 147). In contrast, deductive approaches often involve attempting to find the Truth (Gannon & Davies, 2012; Glesne, 2015; Lyotard, 1984). A paradigm of inquiry rooted in postmodernism, such as queer theory, questions the very notion of Truth and what might be considered traditionally rational-derived conclusions based on objectivity, neutrality, and distance (Gamson, 2000; Murphy & Lugg, 2016b). I do not believe such conclusions are possible.
Additionally, to be distant in a project is to fail to engage with collaborative (M Angrosino, 2005; Atkinson & Hammersley, 1993; Fine, 1993b), queer (Gamson, 2000; Murphy & Lugg, 2016b), or activist (Chatterton, 2008; Hale, 2001, 2008) research. Because I engage with emotions as data and emotions are inherently subjective, my project is not commensurate with paradigms concerned with objectivity, neutrality, or distance.

However, imposing queer theory on a project in which the participants may not understand or know of queer theory comes with its own limitations and dilemmas. Queer theory may be an imposition, and it may dominate analysis in unproductive ways. The imposition of such a frame reflects an etic approach to research (Glesne, 2015). While emic and inductive approaches are not understood to be value-neutral, in a project with shared ownership using a framework a priori that participants may not understand or know about is an unethical use of power by the researcher. However, researchers are informed by theory as they make decisions about approach, design, and analysis. I envisioned using queer theory in an abductive approach to this research.

I am interested in queer theory as a means to deconstruct and analyze the world, but I did not want to presume from the outset that queer analyses would be the most productive in this project. Abductive research, or research that moves back and forth between theory and data to allow them to inform one another, best captured my intentions regarding the role of queer theory (Blaikie, 2000; Mason, 2002). Using an abductive frame allowed the articulations of the artists to take priority.
Moving between data and experiences to make meaning of broader concepts makes sense for an ABR project that has multiple iterations of data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). While an outright rejection of etic and emic frameworks was not my aim, I do not believe that theory can ever come last. To believe that a researcher enters into a study as a blank slate is absurd; I, as a researcher, come to a situation with knowledge of theory, but also with my own experiences. To assume that theory would come only after a study is misguided and does not align with my onto-epistemological understanding of the world. I do not believe that theory drives me to explain or look for something in particular, but that I can use my theoretical lens to comprehend the world around me and the data and knowledge created by those I work with.

**Aims of the Project and Research Questions**

This project has one primary aim: to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of emotion in the experiences and articulations of activism among millennials. How are the attacks deployed by dominant political operatives affecting the emotions of young adults engaged in activism? How are those young adult activists responding? How might zines become a part of that response?

I am presupposing that emotions drive activism (see Chapter 2). This impacts my epistemological approach in that I am concerned with the ways that artists’ emotions show up in the visual data and also in the conversations and engagements that are part of this project. My presupposition means I assume that emotions play a significant role in the articulations of activism before I engaged with artists to find out for certain if this is the case.
While emotions’ role in activism has been documented extensively (Arenas, 2015; Askins, 2009; Bosco, 2007; Collin, 2014; Flam & King, 2007; Goodwin et al., 2001; Ost, 2004; Reynolds, 2010; Rodgers, 2010; Webb, 2017; Wilkinson, 2009), none of the extant research has engaged in the creation of art in conjunction with activism. In this project, which engaged with the emotions of subjectivity that have been queered by normative regimes, the transgression of emotions was a significant point of interest for me. My research was guided broadly by the following question: How do young adults experience and articulate the role of emotions in the activism in which they engage?

**Informed Consent**

I shared the informed consent form (please see Appendix F) prior to beginning our first gathering. A clear delineation and definition of confidentiality in the informed consent was shared. As in any qualitative research project, a breach of confidentiality is a risk. In this project, because of its collaborative design, a breach could come from other artists. Assurances of confidentiality must remain unconditional, but this would mean not being able to offer external assistance to artists if they are at risk of harm (Duncan et al., 2009). This means if an artist shared with me during our time together that needed to be shared with others to get help for the artists, that is a choice I was prepared to make. For instance, if an artist shared about on-going abuse, I would have helped get them the appropriate services, even if it meant breaking any trust they may have built with me and the project.

In a case where harm may come to an artist, ethically a breach of confidentiality in order to get this individual help holds primacy over a research project. The
collaborative design may have inhibited discussion that may have arisen differently in a one on one context. This is a risk in any qualitative study, but particularly in ones that involve conversations with queered individuals (Duncan et al., 2009) because these communities are at a higher risk for oppression, abuse, and homelessness. It is therefore important that these risks be laid out forthrightly in informed consent conversations and documents (Sieber & Tolich, 2013).

**Sampling**

Through social media and attending community events centered around progressive issues, I recruited 30 individuals to participate in a series of collaborative art sessions. See Appendix A for a recruitment flyer for this project. Through convenience and heterogeneous sampling (Glesne, 2015), I was able to build a cohort of 14 individuals to come together to create art and explore how they experience and articulate the activism with which they engage.

The use of social media as a recruiting tool made sense for this project as communities which have been queered through their transgressence against normativizing structures experience connections that are more readily possible through the advent of social media (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). By studying young adults who identified with these queered communities, I hope that those who identify as advocates with such communities, activists, educators, educational researchers, practitioners in higher education can better understand how young adults engage and respond in social movements.

**The Artists**
Of the 14 individuals who produced artwork for this project all came from different backgrounds and brought with them a variety of experiences. With the exception of one (Leia) all were from the South. Homogoblin was originally from western Virginia, whereas everyone else was from South Carolina. Briefly, I will describe each of the artists.

Angel_Rainbow_Daisy is a Latinx woman and a first-generation American, she was highly involved in campus life and graduated shortly after the conclusion of this project.

CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 is a White transman. He was heavily involved in student leadership at SCPWI as well as within his academic discipline. Claire is a White queer woman from South Carolina. Claire was heavily involved in student leadership during her first experience at SCPWI; she took some time off and returned to the institution 2016. Upon her return, she focused more on her academics and was not as heavily involved in leadership. At the time of this project she was engaged to Homogoblin, and recruited her to participate in the project.

D.Prince is a heterosexual Black male from South Carolina. He graduated with his master’s degree from SCPWI the semester prior to this project. He also attended SCPWI as an undergraduate student during which time he was a prominent student leader in a variety of different organizations and different student affairs departments.
Homogoblin is a White lesbian woman who was recruited into the project by her fiancée Claire. She was an alumna of SCPWI and worked full-time at a faith-affiliated child care center in the area.

Ladybug is a White man who was in a relationship with Mothman, who recruited him to join this project. Ladybug is originally from South Carolina.

Leia is a White woman originally from New Jersey and was completing her senior year at the time of this project. She was very involved in student leadership during her time at SCPWI.

Makeda is a queer African American woman. She transferred into SCPWI during her junior year and had begun to get involved with student leadership opportunities at the institution.

Mark is a Black man who worked in industry for roughly a decade before returning for a graduate degree. He was older than the other artists by at least ten years yet still a millennial.

Mothman is a White queer genderqueer demigirl. They were a first-year student at SCPWI and had recruited their partner, Ladybug, to be part of this project. They were a budding student leader at SCPWI, helping Ladybug to form a political student organization.

Radically Soft was a recent graduate of SCPWI who identified as a queer Jewish neurodivergent trans nonbinary individual. They recruited their best-friend Sparkle Enby
to join this project. While at SCPWI, they were involved in a few different student organizations, as well as some student protest movements.

Sky Blue Banana is a Jewish woman of African descent. She was a junior at the time of this project and was very good friends with Angel_Rainbow_Daisy.

Sparkle Enby is a White trans queer person with a disability. They often used a motorized chair to get around. They were recruited into this project by their best-friend Radically Soft.

All of these artists had their own stories to share, and some of these stories are reflected in the art that they produced for this project, through the conversations that we shared as a group. Each brought these stories to the collaborative art sessions and helped to create the space that we all shared for the time that we were together.

**Study Site**

Where and when we gathered was convenient for the artists. I wanted to engender a safe space for the group to gather. Provided in this space were the materials to create a zine, including a variety of paper, writing utensils, scissors, glue, stickers, Wi-Fi for access to the internet, and artists’ own technology, as well as laptops for their use.

The location of the study proved to be important. Most of the participants were from the South, and the South served as a focal point for many of the artists. SCPWI, located in Ruckerville\(^{39}\), a small racially diverse and segregated city of about 100,000.

\(^{39}\) Pseudonym for city that SCPWI is located within.
Less than 50% White, the city’s residents reflected larger trends of racial segregation in United States. A 1968 Supreme Court case illustrates the segregation of the state that has been endemic for decades. Citing his freedom of religion, the owner of a popular local business refused to serve African American customers. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiff who was an African American woman. The business continues to operate in Ruckerville. It was not until 2013 that the Confederate flag came down from in front of one of the business locations (Eppley Rupon, 2013). Interestingly, the case was heavily cited in the of Masterpiece Cakeshop, Ltd. V. Colorado Civil Rights Commission decision that was finalized only months after our collaborate art meetings. (For more on this case, please see Appendix H.)

**Units of Analysis and Sources of Data**

Several sets of data were available for analysis. Through the use of participant observation notes and my field journal, I collected the following types of data, which were my units of analysis: (a) the communication between artists; (b) my communication with the artists; (c) the production process of the zine (for example, decision-making styles, content selection, design, platform); (d) the content of the zine; and (e) reflections by the artists on the process in informal conversation, written reflections, and the series of art sessions.

First, the communication between the artists happened in the various meetings that we held to build the zine. During this time, we engaged in conversations that we co-created. Second, during these meetings, we engaged in the creation of zines to explore and communicate the experiences of our activism.
The units of analysis in any research project were “those things we examine in order to create a summary description of all such units and to explain differences among them” (Babbie, 2009, p. 99). While I did not intend to proffer a generalizable outcome for this study, as its design was about creating a space where multiple perspectives and backgrounds can engage, Babbie’s (2009) definition of a unit of analysis was useful in limited ways. I accept that units of analysis are the things that are examined, but I do not believe that they must always be summarizable. Attending to my commitment to multiple narratives, I offer my analyses, but each artist has their own summation of their experiences (Haraway, 1988).

While I described the units of analysis as distinctive, they were often layered and intertwined. For instance, the communication between artists and my communication with the artists were often intermingled. Moreover, the communication between artists was sometimes about the production of the zine the content, reflections, and sometimes the communication had nothing to do with what was in front of them but just conversations. As such, these units of analysis were a place to start, but I recognize that the artists, and their creations were multi-faceted and multi-layered, and cannot be forced into distinctive units of analysis.

**Coding Choices**

Coding the data for this project was a difficult task because there were five sources of data and because of the use of visual data. I completed several cycles of coding, and several types of coding, through this project. The first round of coding was emotion coding, which reflects the project’s aims. Saldaña (2015) explained that although
“some researchers may perceive [affective coding] as lacking objectivity or rigor for social science inquiry” (p. 124), he believed that “affective qualities are core motives for human action” (p. 124). I believe that emotions are central to the understanding of the human experience. Further, emotions were central to this study specifically, although some researchers believe that they undermine objectivity (Goodwin et al., 2001; Jaggar, 1989; Weber, 1978). I did not intend to engage in a binary understanding of objectivity, in which one attains or fails to attain some ideal of objectivity, but instead, I argued that no research is objective, and instead I reveled in a nonobjective stance. Emotion coding is the labeling of emotions recalled and/or expressed by the individuals engaging in a project and can also take the form of inferences made by the researcher (Saldaña, 2015). I believe activist-scholars should attend to the nonrational aspects and emotional lives of ourselves and our participants (Kozinets, 2010). I believe that by keeping emotion central to our understanding of human experiences, scholar-activists create richer texts from which to understand our shared humanity. Further, to center the experiences of the artists (Saldaña, 2015), in vivo coding was used. In vivo coding is using a code word or phrase that “refers to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 105).

Clarke (2005) suggested that we ignore visual media in the postmodern age at our own analytic peril. To that end, I took seriously the visual media that was produced through this project. Treating visual media as a source of data to understand how artifacts, such as zines, embody meaning and values within our material culture was significant in this project (Berger, 2014). The physical media produced (zines) was coded through descriptive coding. Though coding visual data is a “slippery slope”, and there is
irony in using words to “articulate our ‘take’ on pictures and imagery,” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 57) I agree with Saldaña that codes serve to “generate language-based data that accompany the visual data” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 57). I utilized descriptive coding to help generate the language-based data to accompany these visual pieces of data. Descriptive coding, or topic coding, works similarly to the way hashtags work in social media (Saldaña, 2015), because it links related pieces of information. I captured data throughout the creation process through emotion coding and in vivo coding of conversations.

I used pattern coding for my second-cycle coding in order to develop the meta-code for the data (Saldaña, 2015). While the first cycle of coding (emotion and in vivo) served to summarize the data into digestible bits, the second cycle grouped these summaries into a more manageable “number of categories, themes, or subjects” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 236).

I completed rounds of emotion and in vivo coding on participant observation notes and my field journal regarding (a) the communication between artists, and (b) my communication with the artists. Additionally, I completed a round of descriptive coding on (c) the production process of the zine including decision-making I observed, content selection, design, and platform; (d) the content of the zine; and (e) the reflections by the artists on the process in informal conversations, written reflections, and during the production of zines across the series of art sessions. After the first cycle of coding (emotion, in vivo, and descriptive), I completed pattern coding for my second cycle. These actions allowed me to better understand the five units of analysis, and thus to better understand the study I completed.
Ontology, Epistemology, Positionality

Ontology is hard to place, as it is the very nature of how you see the world. By questioning your own ontology, you are asking yourself “what you see as the very nature and essence of things in the social world” (Mason, 2002, p. 14). For me, this has long been hard to pinpoint. My ontology is so fundamental to my life that to ask me to describe it is like asking a fish to describe water; it is their/my world. I believe first in people and the fundamental knowledge intrinsic in the experiential genius that comes from each individual. I believe that the conflicts that we live are surface reflections of our own believed inadequacies, but upon further reflection are in actuality conflicts of our experiences manifest through conflicting discourses. I believe that our world is created through these discourses (Butler, 2011; Foucault, 1978). I border in my ontology and epistemology, one flowing into another. This is a queer move (Gamson, 2000).

I situate myself as a queer theorist, learning on the “almost too elastic properties of this word” (Stockton, 2004, p. 282), queer not only in sexuality but also queer as a form of transgression against dominant structures and narratives (Anzaldúa, 2010). For me, an individual is queered not just by sexuality, but by the act of transgression, by acceding to the ontological duty of queerness, which is to disrupt the “regimes of the normal” (Warner, 1993, p. 16) and to resist the homogenization of culture by challenging dominant discourses (de Lauretis, 1991). To adopt a queered ontology is a postmodern move, acknowledging that there are multiple truths and no single Truth, believing that all knowledge is contextual, rather than “‘out there’ waiting to be discovered” (Kilgore, 2001, p. 56) A queer ontology is one of a materialist-realist, believing that the “real world
makes a material difference” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012, p. 27) in regard to race, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, and all other aspects of identity.

Queerness blends ontology and epistemology. I see the world as being created by the experiences that create the knowledge that subjects embody. Therefore, knowledge creates the world, and the world creates knowledge. There is no pre-discursive world, and the world is not made up of dualisms, but moves and flows between multiple points of experience, understanding, and reality (Palazzani, 2012; Walters, 1996). Queer researchers reject grand narratives but also adopt a critical stance (Gamson, 2000); it is a paradigm that merges a critical understanding of the world with the poststructural commitment to deconstruction.

“Epistemology is, literally, your theory of knowledge, and should, therefore, concern the principles and rules by which you decide whether and how social phenomena can be known, and how knowledge can be demonstrated” (Mason, 2002, p. 16). Queer epistemology, as nebulous as it may be, resonates with me because of its acceptance of the “blurring of genres” (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 97). I find myself torn between a critical constructivism that aims to explore “social power structures in an attempt to discover the truth as it relates to social power struggles” (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 105) and a commitment to a queer epistemology, which has a primary goal of subverting the “very notion of stability” (Hammers & Brown III, 2004, p. 95). A commitment to queer epistemology finds the researcher in tension with the very stable notion of the structural construction of identities, the historical and cultural normativity of oppression, and the scripted nature of oppressive identities (Gamson, 2000; Hammers & Brown III, 2004). I
am on the search for a way for researchers to exceed such binary oppositions as the tolerant and the tolerated, the oppressed and oppressor, and still hold on to an analysis of social difference that can account for how dynamics of subordination and subjection work at the level of the historical, the structural, the epistemological, the conceptual, the social, and the psychic (Britzman, 1995).

A critical commitment resolves that the world “is based on a struggle for power” (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 102). Queer theory accepts this notion but rejects the idea that the struggle for power is limited to one expression of identity. For example, queer theory takes Crenshaw’s (1991) idea of intersectionality and builds upon identity as expressions that are not fixed at an intersection, but fluid and flowing depending on experiences, identities, and space (Massumi, 2002). While intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) can be useful in cultivating more-inclusive political platforms, queer theorists cannot rely upon it as part of their epistemology, due to their commitment to undermining stable categories of identity. Instead, queer theorists commit to deconstructing identity from a multitude of spaces. Unlike in feminist perspectives, which would often privilege intersectionality for doing this work of deconstruction, I lean upon assemblage for a more nuanced understanding of the materialist reality (Crenshaw, 1991; DeLanda, 2006).

**Positionality as a White Masculine Queer in Decolonial Work**

Having worked with students for a number of years to develop politically progressive acts and forging my personal identity in the punk-rock-influenced resistance to President George W. Bush, I have come to understand my role in the academy as an activist-scholar. An activist-scholar is someone who engages, uses, and navigates the
border across communities and academia (Villenas, 1996) with the aim of pursuing equity.

Villenas described her struggle to find her place and navigate the insider/outsider dichotomy as an activist-scholar who shared her “ethnic consciousness and regional and linguistic experiences” (1996, p. 712) with Latina women with whom she worked and for whom she translated in a rural town in the southeastern US. She shared that as she engaged in community with Latina women and White community members she was positioned by White community members as an authority as a researcher and as a colonizer in some exchanges across Latina women and White community members. She navigated a colonized experience as a Chicana, too. Villenas, like many activist-scholars, struggled to find her role due to the conflicting nature of her own positionality, both within the research project and also within the academy.

Like many activist-scholars, I come to my work from a place of marginalization. My childhood was one of knowing about my ancestors who were part of the Holocaust. I remember meeting my great aunt at a young age; she always wore long sleeves to hide the tattoo that is a rejection of God’s law, “ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:28, King James Bible) as well as a physical embodiment of both her Jewish history and her personal history of surviving the Holocaust.

Moreover, I knew from an early age that I was different than my peers. I was the child on the playground who never picked on others, but who would defend others. I place this squarely between the influence of my parents and my martial arts training; both
taught me to not use my abilities to cause others harm or terror. As I grew into my own sexual awakening, I also realized that I did not only like girls. Like many other people, I assumed I would and should. I also knew that this was something that I should not tell others and that I could easily hide this, that I liked girls as much as I liked the boys. Years of internalized oppression about my own queer identity, in part, drives my passion and commitment to the full embrace of all people for who they are, rather than in spite of who they are.

Despite my own queerness, I am the embodied manifestation of the colonizer, and thus, the academy. And so, while my commitments are to social justice, and a rejection of the status quo that is often reinforced by the academy (Ahmed, 2012), I am often taken as, and can be complicit in, structures of MAGA through my masculinity and Whiteness. As an activist-scholar, I aspire to engage both my own experiences of being queered both by sexuality and oppression with my instances of embodied privilege. To this end, I engage both my queered and colonizer identity in my activist-scholarship. Navigating these positions across borders and disrupting them through my work, I hope to be able to speak and listen with many different progressive communities as part of my scholarship and activism, my activist-scholarship.

Despite my own queerness, I am the embodiment of the colonizer. I descend from the ones who laid their imperial will upon the world to cause all of our minds to be colonized. While my decolonizing work is different from that of someone who actively faces oppression, it is still important and necessary. As someone who is an oppressor, decolonizing my mind means understanding that the way I interact with the world and the
way the world interacts with me are systematically unfair at best. Decolonizing my mind means that there are a multitude of ways to know, and that the way that I presently know may not be the best way for anyone, myself included. While this is certainly different from the decolonizing work that the subaltern must accomplish (Gramsci, 1971; L. T. Smith, 2012; Spivak, 2003), it is important to me as a White researcher to speak in unison and work in solidarity with targeted groups for a more equitable world.

It is also important to note that for queer researchers, part of working toward decolonized positions is a rejection of static and uniform identities such as oppressor and colonizer. This is not to shrug off my complicities and complacency, but to continue the conversation in rejecting the universalizing of experiences. While I experience the privilege of those who are raced White, classed middle-class, and gendered masculine, through reflexivity I attempt to engage with and denounce these binary understandings of targeting and targeted identities. I acknowledge that people of these identities cannot themselves undo the legacy of brutality enacted in the name of the supremacy of these identities. My means of choice to undo this legacy is through relationships and the transmission of nondominant discourses to counter the dominant, in hopes of creating a more just world for those who come after me. I will surely fail at some point, as many do, but what (I hope) is important is not solely the success—though that is imperative as well—but the continuous attempts to be better at creating this world through the unmaking of the oppression that has come before and will sadly still likely come after.

As a masculine-presenting individual, I have access to privileges. I identify as masculine, rather than as male or man, as a way to queer gender categories. As gender is
iterative and reciprocal of performances (Butler, 2011), I opt to challenge performances that have been gendered male. As such, while I acknowledge my access to male privilege, I attempt to challenge notions of hegemonic masculinity by the use of masculine as identity, and the adoption of non-binary pronouns (ze/hir/hirs).

As an activist-scholar (Villenas, 1996), I wish to analyze power structures to learn how to grind down these social structures (Lincoln et al., 2011). Like Villenas (1996), I strive to explore and maintain the role of an activist-scholar who must balance my commitments to communities while working within an academy that privileges a particular form of knowledge (Adsit et al., 2015; Ahmed, 2012; Talburt, 2000). As a scholar-activist who embodies a colonizer, and who is also an insider in the millennial activist community, there are limits to my work. For instance, as discussed more in depth in Chapter 6, my insider knowledge of the language and experiences that millennial activists experienced at SCPWI and in the surrounding area meant that many of the artists referred to events, experiences, and individuals assuming that I knew what and who they were talking about. While I often thought that I knew to what they were referring, only through conversations after the fact was I be able to confirm whether this was true. The insider/outsider status was a tension in this iteration of my work.

Moreover, due to my already present connections to the millennial activist community, for those who may have wished to participate in research and remain more anonymous, this would not have been possible. This was due both to the design, collaborative art, but also to the fact that they may have known me. While I largely consider my engagement with these communities to be a benefit for working with these
artists, there may be some who may not have participated due to having known me previously. As such, in another iteration of this project, locating the project in a space in which I was not as well-known would produce a different outcome.

I have struggled to find my voice as a scholar, coming from a space in which my own concepts of knowledge and smartness were devalued in educational structures (Ardoin, 2013; Hatt, 2012). In addition, being a queer, progressive student affairs administrator at a conservative PWI has been deeply troubling (Weiser & Wagner, 2017). Like many before me, I come to my activist scholarship through my own experiences of marginalization. I have faced many barriers to my professional work in student affairs. Such barriers were the initial driver for me to enroll in graduate studies, to better understand experiences of and reasons for marginalization in education. This project is an extension of that beginning, to better understand the experiences of marginalization and also to speak back to that power, challenge it, and subvert it.

**Significance and Implications**

As I shared in Chapter 2, there has been little research on young adult activists and emotion in the contemporary political moment. When emotions are covered, they are often viewed from a macro perspective, ignoring individualized emotions. This project is directed in part to young adult activists and the educators who support them. It may also be a way to speak back to the educators and administrators who attempt to derail them. This study served as a way to uncover and explore the lived experiences of these individuals and to support them in their work. To that end, I directly engaged in the
support of these young adult activists, and practiced discernment in how to support their work, so others may learn from them.

Further, this project was a continuation of scholarship that engaged with the queer politics of emotion, and the centrality of emotion to understanding our lifeworlds (Ahmed, 2014; Husserl, 1970). This project was openly ideological and methodological, as I attempted to better understand and to create road maps for arts-based research projects that engaged with agentic activists (Lather, 1986). I also sought to create “new institutional spaces that favor, facilitate, and give due recognition to alternative research products and to new forms of collaboration” (Nagar, 2002, p. 185). I hope in this project I have added to the literature regarding young adult activists, but also to the methodological literature on activist and ABR.

Because this project explored the experiences of young adult activists in the age of MAGA, it will help situate knowledges about how different communities bind together in resistance to oppressive and normativizing regimes (Ahmed, 2014; Warner, 1993). This project may be of use to several different audiences, including activists, activist-scholars, university administrators, and anyone hoping to gain more insight into the contemporary rise of activism among young adults (see Chapter 6 for this discussion).

This project was also productive for my own end, in preparation for my career in working with future educators. How can I better help support young adult activists? And as a future faculty member, how can I teach educators how to work with and support student activists, rather than shutting them down, which I saw happen too often in my
professional work? To that end, I address this project to those communities, and to myself, hoping to teach and learn through the writing and dissemination of this research.

**Advantages and Disadvantages of My Study**

This project was an arts-based qualitative research project informed by decolonial and participatory commitments, and it has both advantages and disadvantages. Qualitative research trades breadth and generalizability for an in-depth approach to a topic. While the findings in this project are not generalizable, I do believe they may help add to the understanding of young adult activism in the era of MAGA. Often, qualitative methods are critiqued in regard to “interrater reliability, generalizability, and replication,” yet—like many qualitative researchers—I am more interested in “interpretation, historical analysis [and] cultural critique” (Prasad, 2005, p. 289). I reject notions of replication, generalizability, or interrater reliability. This project was about engaging with a community of young people who have been impacted by MAGA. The community engagement of this project was an advantage, as seen in the way the call for participation was shared on social media by those who are interested in the topic, and in the ways those who have participated brought their friends into the project.

Arts-based research lends itself to the type of study I undertook, due to its intention to challenge assumptions (Leavy, 2017). ABR allows “readers and viewers to vicariously reexamine significant dimensions of human affairs through the use of aesthetic design elements” (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 23). Art is a reorganization of experiences through a visual medium “that renders complex the apparently simple or simplifies the apparently complex. Research is the enhancement of meaning revealed
through ongoing interpretations of complex relationships that are continually created, re-created, and transformed” (Irwin, 2004, p. 31). I address complexities of identity and resistance in Chapter 5.

Arts-based research also has drawbacks. Not everyone can be a Monet, Dali, O’Keefe, or Kahlo. Further, ABR need not only be practiced by the “Sullivans, Saldañas, and Springgays of the world” (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 24). It is important for ABR—even if one rejects the idea of the so-called mastery of art—to skillfully use aesthetic design elements to “convey otherwise unavailable social meaning” (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 24). This is part of the goodness of arts-based methods (Barone & Eisner, 2011). Art is hard, and it is scary. It is also liberating in its creation (Barone & Eisner, 2011; Lorde, 1984; Marcuse, 2006). As young people, we are taught what art is and, importantly, what art is not. This may have scared away individuals who wanted to engage in this project, due to their previous assumption that they were not artists. And indeed, even for those artists who chose to participate frustration around the aesthetic production of the zines themselves was an issue (see Chapter 5). I believe that anyone can create art and that everyone does, in their own way, and shared this idea of inclusivity in the creation of art at the outset of the project.

Collaborative research has arisen from calls for more-engaged communities within ethnographic research. In particular, some believe that “its impact would be greater if practitioners were themselves involved in the research process, both because that involvement would be likely to change the research and make it more proactively relevant and because they would be more motivated to draw on it as a result of being
involved” (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1993, p. 253). As a former student affairs professional who was deeply entrenched in the local young adult activist community, I embody the engaged practitioner, being both researcher and educational administrator/practitioner. This certainly had its limitations and drawbacks, but it has allowed me to access young adult activists in a way I would not have been able to if I had not been embedded in this community for almost a decade.

In summary, there were significant strengths to this project, and some of these strengths were also disadvantages if perceived through a positivist lens. An arts-based approach is strong for projects related to identity and resistance to oppression (Leavy, 2017). Qualitative research projects are also useful in centering the voices of participants, but due to the centrality of voice and the emphasis on depth, breadth is sacrificed (Mason, 2002, Glesne, 2015). This may be seen as a disadvantage by scholars who aim for generalizability and transferability, notions of research that come from a quantitative framework (Glesne, 2015). Further, while I had interest in including artists beyond the immediate locale, for financial reasons I was limited to doing this project with individuals in the area. Future iterations may include multiple sites and cross-case analysis.

This project was also rife with the anticipation of a traditional notion of failure. As with any research project, outcomes are reliant on participation. This is a strength, as it may have created more buy-in from the artists (Castleden, Garvin, & First Nation, 2008; Kidd & Kral, 2005), but collective potential was contingent on participants showing up across our art sessions and dependent on the dynamics of the collective. This
is a strength in gathering data, but it demands higher levels of involvement from those interested in getting involved.

Trustworthiness and Validity

Five Tensions in Arts-Based Research

The validity of an arts-based research project is different from other aspects of research. Eisner (2007) suggested, and Siegesmund-Taylor and Siegesmund (2007) expanded on Eisner’s work to argue, that there are five tensions when considering ABR projects. To assess the validity of an ABR project is to engage with these five tensions.

The first tension is between the imaginative and the referentially clear. To assess validity related to this tension, we ask whether the project inspired dialogue and whether understanding of the issues the project addressed was clearer than before its creation (Siegesmund & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2007). While ABR projects navigate the tensions between project representations that are “layered versus the linear, the cacophonous versus the discursive, and the ambiguous verses the aphoristic,” those of us who use ABR must also acknowledge that “comprehending complexity is not a given” (Siegesmund & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2007, p. 232). To engage with the tension means to build the experience so that it can be communicated to others.

The second of these tensions is between the particular and the general. This tension demands that the “audience is brought into this process of discovery” (Siegesmund & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2007, p. 241) and the artist and audience are brought together through the shared experience. This tension focuses on the “particular conditions of an educational situation in order to illuminate its distinctive features and, at the same
time, developing observations and insights that extend well beyond the particular that was addressed in the first place” (Eisner, 2007, p. 20). This is central to my project. I wanted others to gain a greater understanding of the experiences of young adult activists. The “generalizability in arts-based research is its ability to both widen a circle of conversation and to ask better questions” (Siegesmund & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2007, p. 236). The third tension is between the aesthetics of beauty and the verisimilitude of truth. The validity of an ABR project is related to how the artistic engagement opens a conversation. For me, this is the other side of the token from the first tension regarding the aspects of validity. The scholar or practitioner of ABR (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2017) experiences tension “between the desire to achieve a work product that has aesthetic properties and the desire to achieve at least some degree of verisimilitude in our work” (Eisner, 2007, p. 21). Aesthetics cannot be the scholar’s only purpose. While scholars may revel in the aesthetic of a project, we navigate the tension of verisimilitude, or the appearance of truth. Scholars may go further than other qualitative researchers in the portrayal of data in search of the truth; we may “break lines, create composite characters, craft a data-poem” (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2017, p. 238). That is not to say that scholars are misleading, or untrustworthy—but we may stretch the portrayal to an exaggeration because it is this “exaggeration of the features of a situation through which we come to grasp its significance” (Eisner, 2007, pp. 21–22). For me, this is similar to the work of satire, a creative art form I have long used to teach topics that students experience with discomfort (see Chapter 2).
The fourth tension is between better questions and definitive answers. What matters for the validity of a project is not merely the conversation or dialogue it produces, but the purposeful and intentional dialogue about the artistic engagement. This resonates with my commitment to challenging and disrupting hegemonic norms through research (Warner, 1993). Eisner (2007) suggested that the raising of fresh questions may be one of the “most significant form[s] of intellectual achievement” (pp. 22). He acknowledged that more-traditional forms of research also strive to ask better questions and do not simply come up with conclusions, but that there is a division “between the more literally oriented conclusions of conventional research and the more metaphorical conclusions, if they can be called that, of arts-based research” (pp. 23). I do not particularly enjoy this division between ABR and what Eisner (2007) calls conventional research. He seems to define anything but ABR as “conventional research”, but I argue that other formations of qualitative inquiry may also come to more-metaphorical conclusions or raise more questions than answers.

The fifth tension is between metaphoric novelty and literal utility. This aspect of validity questions whether a project is praised simply for novelty or for its attempt to expand our understanding of an educational issue (Siegesmund & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2007). Scholartists may revel in the aesthetics of art, but we are also educators and researchers and must remember that the end product of a research project is a “tool … that is supposed to contribute to the quality of education students receive and that arts-based research must ultimately be appraised on the extent to which that aim is realized” (Eisner, 2007, p. 23). The purpose of this is twofold. First, we must remain cognizant of our commitments to the students and the communities with which we are working. When
work does not “contribute to the enrichment of the student’s educational experience, it loses its utility as a form of educational research” (Eisner, 2007, p. 23). Second, we must continue to produce work that is useful, or it “is simply not going to be enough to sustain interest and engender high regards among our colleagues” (Eisner, 2007, p. 24). We must therefore continue to navigate these tensions to produce work that is valid and trustworthy—work that can be used and admired; work that forces us to ask questions, and provides us answers; work that challenges and inspires; and work that is here and now, while providing a road map for the then and there (J. E. Muñoz, 2009).

**Four Principles of Arts-Based Research**

Cahnmann-Taylor (2017), in an updated version of her text on ABR in education, revised the five tensions into four principles: (a) The Principle of Subjectivity and Public Good, (b) The Principle of Attribution and Ethical Good, (c) The Principle of Impact and Aesthetic Good, and (d) The Principle of Translation to Scientific Good. Briefly, I summarize these principles in order.

First, The Principle of Subjectivity and Public Good calls upon the notion of hooks’s outlaw culture, that research should disturb “the conventional, acceptable political of representation” (1994, pp. 4–5). ABR should invite the viewer to “question hegemonic norms and to ask questions such as those that may not have been asked before” (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2017, p. 248). Scholartists, or purveyors of ABR, should be careful to not create propaganda through their scholartistry. Instead research can, “when deeply engaged, rise above facile ‘good/bad’, ‘human/non-human’, or ‘subjective/objective’ distinctions. Public good can be obtained when scholartists explore
topics with complexity for more multifaceted understanding” (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2017, p. 250).

While ABR questions the concept of data, Cahnmann-Taylor’s (2017) second principle, The Principle of Attribution and Ethical Good, involves taking the notion of research seriously. Even when scholartists may “balk at lengthy and detailed IRB processes based on medical research paradigms, the principle of ethical good can help us see these processes in a new favorable light” (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2017, p. 251). In an era when “‘fact’ vs. ‘fiction’ becomes increasingly blurred, we need to be more attentive to attribution and ethics than ever before” (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2017, p. 252). The Principle of Attribution and Ethical Good means while adhering to ethics and norms established in research, we push the boundaries of what constitutes research.

Since the beginning of the ABR movement, scholartists have been challenging “qualitative inquiry boundaries to embrace the arts as more than a metaphor for research practice but as research itself” (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2017, p. 253). The third principle, The Principle of Impact and Aesthetic Good, is primarily driven by six ways scholartists can create “good” scholartistry:

1. Spend systematic time with other artists working in the same genre.
2. Consult more-expert artists or connoisseurs for feedback and/or collaboration.
3. Experiment and take risks to misperform or fail (Prendergast & Belliveau, 2017) and articulate the implications.
4. Exhibit creative work/thinking/imagination for public consideration and response.

5. Have a clear sense of the “So what?” For whom/what does this matter, why, how, and to what end?

6. Articulate entanglements when working across modalities and disciplines and with human/nonhuman agents, to further inscribe and expand ABR as a field (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2017, p. 254).

While some of these, such as getting to know art of a similar genre, may seem commonsense, it is important to note that being a scholartist means “never to have arrived but to be always searching for creative ways to employ old tools in service to the highest quality, impact, and implications of the work” (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2017, p. 255). This is resonant with queer implications, because to be queer is also to never settle and to be illuminated for the potentiality of a future (J. E. Muñoz, 2009).

The Principle of Translation to Scientific Good means pushing beyond just the aesthetic quality of our research and ensuring that scholartists are in fact “merging arts and science traditions” (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2017, p. 255). While some scholartists may discard the notion of research due to an assumption of its limitations (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2017), instead we might push the boundaries of what constitutes research. The final principle means that scholartists must be able to speak not only about what we have done, but also about why it matters. Cahnmann-Taylor argued that those in the natural sciences “increasingly look to the human and social sciences to better understand their fields; ABR is likewise enhanced by scientific forms of communication, processes, and methods” (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2017, p. 255). To do so is to ignore Eisner’s (2007)
warning that ABR may rely too much on novelty and may discount utility. Scholartists benefit from being able to translate their research to a larger community, to increase the use of their research. To fail to do so is to fail to adhere to the other three principles.

These tensions and principles helped to guide this project to ensure that

- it is liberatory,
  - The Principle of Attribution and Ethical Good
  - Metaphoric Novelty
  - Better Questions Versus Definitive Answers
- it involves action,
  - The Principle of Impact and Aesthetic Good
  - The Imaginative Versus the Referentially Clear
  - Literal Utility
- it is queer, and
  - The Principle of Subjectivity and Public Good
  - Particular Versus General
- it is research that can help educators and activists.
  - The Principle of Translation to Scientific Good
  - Aesthetics of Beauty Versus Verisimilitude of Truth

Confidentiality

In any project, confidentiality is of paramount importance; however, in this project artists may opt out of remaining anonymous. While it is well-known that the “single most likely source of harm in social science inquiry” (Reiss, 1979, p. 73) is a
breach of confidentiality, in my research design, the agency of ownership may cause artists to breach their own confidentiality, or to profess ownership of the project. In this project, the artists worked collaboratively to create art. Thus, their identities were known to one another. It was important that I as the primary investigator allow this ownership, but that I balanced this with a caution to the artists not to breach others’ confidentiality. This is also known as internal confidentiality—when participants can identify one another (Tolich, 2004). Confidentiality often pertains to keeping research participants’ identities hidden to people outside of the study, and internal confidentiality is often overlooked. Tolich (2004) argued that researchers must “enlarge the principle of confidentiality to accommodate risks to insiders from other insiders” (p. 106). This is particularly interesting when the research design involves these artists coming together. Traditional informed consent must be updated to allow the participants to have agency over their own aspect of confidentiality. Confidentiality must also remain fluid. By this, I mean that participants may opt out of confidentiality initially but may later change their minds.

**Political Tensions**

Research projects are never apolitical. They always serve some role, and for me, that role is to erode social structures that may reinscribe oppression. I do not believe that research is the balm to the world’s ailments, but I do believe it can help us through to our collective potentiality (J. E. Muñoz, 2009). In our contemporary, ever-shrinking yet diversifying world, activist-scholars must take care not to assign narratives to communities through research but to use research to help communities add their song to the global chorus of voices. Activist research methodologies are intentional about our
politics helping “drive the formulation of our research objectives” (Hale, 2001, p. 14). As researchers, we must balance our own needs and desires with the need to engage communities in shared and equitable ownership of research. I believe this project is a small, local, meaningful example of shared and equitable ownership.
CHAPTER 4 : IMAGE INTERLUDE

This image interlude serves to set the stage for my findings chapter. Below, you will find the images created by the artists in alphabetical order by their names, and by the meetings that the art was created. I set these art pieces before the findings chapter in order to invite your engagement with them prior to my analysis and to set the mood for the following analyses and discussion.
Figure 4.1 Angel_Rainbow_Daisy 1
# I STAND WITH IMMIGRANTS

“When Mexico sends their people…”

IMMIGRANTS WE GET THE JOB DONE!

‘BAD HOMBRES’ pick the food we all eat.

‘BAD HOMBRES’ have their homes behind to provide

for entire family.

‘BAD HOMBRE’? TAKE A LOOK IN THE

MIRROR!

LUCHA POR TUS DERECHOS

Las mujeres de mi raza son hermosas.

con su pelo largo, negro, y ojos oscuros.

Eres bella. Eres fuerte. Eres todo lo que te

demandan que no puedes ser.

WE ARE NOT FIESTY WE ARE NOT SPICY.

WE ARE FIGHTERS. WE ARE LUCHADORAS.

WE CARRY THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD ON

OUR SHOULDERS & FIGHT FOR WHAT IS RIGHT.

# LATINAPower # LATINxPower

Figure 4.2 Angel_Rainbow_Daisy 2
Figure 4.3 CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 Exterior
Figure 4.4 CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 Interior
Figure 4.5 Claire
Figure 4.6 D.Prince
Figure 4.7 Homogoblin 1
I don’t know how to explain to you that you should care about other people.

Figure 4.8 Leia 1 Side A
Cynicism isn't wisdom, it's a lazy way to say that you've been burned. It seems if anything, you'd be less certain after everything you ever learned.
Resistance Has to Come in Different Forms

There Is No Manual

There is no wrong way to do activism — as long as it is Collaborative. Invoke Change. Coordinate.

Chapter 1

Resistance?

How to help others if you can?

Chapter 113

Expansion has set in...
Figure 4.11 Makeda
Figure 4.12 Mark
Figure 4.13 Mothman and Ladybug
Figure 4.14 Radically Soft
Figure 4.15 Sky Blue Banana 1
Figure 4.16 Sparkle Enby
Figure 4.17 Tēgan
Figure 4.18 CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 2
Figure 4.19 CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 and Leia
Figure 4.20 Claire 2
Figure 4.21 Homogoblin 2
Figure 4.22 Leia 3
Figure 4.23 Sky Blue Banana 2
Figure 4.24 Makeda 2
Figure 4.25 Collaborative Final Piece (CatsAreBetterThanDogs420, Leia, Sky Blue Banana, Homogoblin, Makeda, Claire, Mothman, and Lady Bug)
Figure 4.26 Leia Protest Zine – Cover

Figure 4.27 Leia Protest Zine - Page 1 & 2
And that’s why this weekend, at the MARCH FOR OUR LIVES, it was really beautiful to hear from the young people, tired already from their fears of going to school

With the Elders of the protest movement, like Rep. John Lewis, a civil rights icon who has spent his whole life on the front lines of the right side of History.

As the “Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Position Paper on Vietnam” from 1966 once said...

"... The United States Government has never guaranteed the freedom of oppressed citizens and is not yet truly determined to end the rule of terror and oppression within its own borders."

It doesn’t seem as if much has changed. As Emma Gonzalez said in her speech this weekend “Fight for your life before it’s somebody else’s job.”

Figure 4.28 Leia Protest Zine - Page 3 & 4

Figure 4.29 Leia Protest Zine -Page 4
Figure 4.30 Leia Protest Zine – Back Cover

Figure 4.31 Leia Protest Poste
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I detail the findings of this project. How do young adult activists articulate and experience emotion in their activisms in light of the contemporary political climate? The findings are layered and complex, as was the community of artists that came together. As I shared in detail in Chapter 3, the artists were 14: Angel_Rainbow_Daisy, CatsAreBetterThanDogs420, Claire, D.Prince, Homogoblin, Ladybug, Leia, Makeda, Mark, Mothman, Radically Soft, Sky Blue Banana, Sparkle Enby, and Tēgan.

At the first art session, all 14 artists participated. Because it was near the end of the semester, some artists, who were students were not able to make the other two sessions. At the second session, six artists were present: CatsAreBetterThanDogs420, Claire, Homogoblin, Leia, Makeda, and Sky Blue Banana. At the third and final meeting, D.Prince, Leia, Ladybug, Makeda, and Mothman were present. Leia and Makeda were the only artists who attended all three art sessions. Of note, some artists spoke more than others at our meetings. Artists who attended the second and third art sessions are represented more than those who attended only the first art session.

On their intake forms, the artists identified communities they belonged to, their age, what pronouns they used, and whether they were currently enrolled in school. The represented communities identified by the artists were women, queer, trans, genderqueer, low income, Latinx, immigrant, Jewish, nonbinary, African American, and White. Three individuals used singular “they” pronouns, the remaining artists used either he/him or
she/her. The age range was from 18 to 36. All but two of the artists were current students at SCPWI. Five of the artists graduated from SCPWI within the past two years.

Table 5.1 Artist Reported Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Demographics as Shared</th>
<th>Pronouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angel_Rainbow_Daisy</td>
<td>Latinx, Woman, Immigrant</td>
<td>She/Her/Hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CatsAreBetterThanDogs420</td>
<td>Queer, Trans, White</td>
<td>He/Him/His and They/Them/Their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Queer, Woman, Low Income</td>
<td>She/Her/Hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.Prince</td>
<td>African American Male Straight</td>
<td>He/Him/His</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homogoblin</td>
<td>Lesbian White Woman</td>
<td>She/Her/Hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladybug</td>
<td>White Male</td>
<td>He/Him/His</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leia</td>
<td>White Woman</td>
<td>She/Her/Hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makeda</td>
<td>Queer African American Woman</td>
<td>She/Her/Hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>He/Him/His</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothman</td>
<td>Queer, Genderqueer, Demigirl, White</td>
<td>They/Them/Their or She/Her/Hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radically Soft</td>
<td>Queer, Trans, Jewish, Nonbinary, Neurodivergent</td>
<td>They/Them/Their or Ze/Hir/Hirs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky Blue Banana</td>
<td>African, Jewish</td>
<td>She/Her/Hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sparkle Enby</td>
<td>Queer, Trans, Disabled, White</td>
<td>They/Them/Their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tēgan</td>
<td>Woman, White</td>
<td>She/Her/Hers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I used multiple rounds of coding in my first data coding cycle. The first round was completed using emotion coding, centering the affective qualities of human action.
As emotions were central to this project, this first round of coding was a natural choice. Emotion coding is coding of emotions as expressed by the artists, or as remembered by me in fieldnotes and observations. My second round of coding was in vivo coding to track closely the words of the artists. In vivo coding is the use of the natural language of the speaker, transformed into a code (Saldaña, 2015).

Additionally, acknowledging that visual data is central to this project (Clarke, 2005), I used descriptive coding to accompany the visual data. Descriptive coding, sometimes known as topic coding, works similarly to the way hashtags work in social media; the codes connect similar pieces of data (Saldaña, 2015). In my second cycle of coding, I used pattern coding to create a more manageable number of categories, themes, and salient points (Saldaña, 2015). These multiple rounds of coding allowed me to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the data, both visual (Holm, 2010; Holm et al., 2017) and, when available, the interpretation of the art by the artist. Visual forms of data are useful in studying human experiences in complex ways (Holm et al., 2017). I connect data to other findings, to literature, and to theory where appropriate. In closing, I summarize the findings.

In coding and analyzing the data, I found eight themes: (1) The Demands of Artistry; (2) Building a Community; (3) Distance in Families of Birth; (4) Resistance to Oppression; (5) Emotion; (6) Mental Health, Self-Care, and Guilt; (7) The South; and (8) Social Media. These themes are laid out in Appendix E. With the exception of the first—the demands of artistry—all the themes had two to four subthemes or salient points significant enough to include in the representation of data. There are five salient points as
part of these overarching themes: (a) “Reactive Existence” to Oppression, (b) Southern Rejection, (c) Queer Love, (d) From the North, and (e) Unsafe Digital Spaces. Some themes overlap with others, such as the relationship between Resistance to Oppression, and Building Community and the South.

I start this chapter by speaking on art, as that is the medium used for discovery and, I believe, it helped engender the community that allowed this project to take place. Second, I move into understanding the building of community and how this has served to produce or inhibit activisms. Third, I explore the distance between the artists and their families of birth and discuss how resistance to oppression manifested in the artists’ work and our conversations. Fourth, I represent some of the emotions central to the artists’ narratives and work. Fifth, I examine look at how the southern context plays a role in the activism of these young adults. Finally, I conclude by addressing new media’s influence on the communication styles of millennials and how this impacts not only their activisms but also their relationships with other activists.

Theme 1: The Demands of Artistry

As this project was in part about the creation of art as a means of exploring the manifestations of activism, conversations about art were central to much of the dialogue between the artists. More than 150 pieces of data, including the actual artifacts, peer-to-peer conversations, and researcher-to-artist conversations, were coded as pertaining to the aesthetic creation.

Our group met three times over the course of five weeks, for approximately two to three hours each time. As I shared above, the first art session had 14 artists in
attendance, several of them recruited by other artist participants who were excited about the project. At the beginning of the meeting, I introduced myself and the purpose of the project (the script I read can be found as Appendix G). We dedicated the second art session to deciding how to move forward prior to the creation of any new art.

Many of the artists initially indicated that they wanted to create something collaborative. This didn’t come to fruition at the first meeting, as everyone made their own individual piece of art. At the second meeting, the artists decided on a consistent paper size to create a zine in the form of a book. However, at the third and final meeting, they decided instead to create a quilt of the completed pieces from the second meeting. The pieces from the first meeting were not included. They were of different sizes, and the artists felt that in order to combine them, they would have to alter the pieces, potentially ruining them. Those pieces remain separate from the final, collaborative piece, which incorporates all the art from meeting two, as well as the connections across the pieces made by those attending the third meeting.

The first meeting took place in a room in the student union, at a table made up of several four-foot-by-two-foot tables. Putting these tables together in an open square created a gap of 12 feet in the middle, as there were three tables on each side. This middle space made communicating difficult, since the people sitting across from you were actually sitting across the room. The second two meetings took place in a conference room at a table that allowed artists sitting across from one another to talk more easily. Data from all three meetings indicated frustration and awkwardness among the artists.
The first meeting had virtually no verbal engagement across the room. I wrote in my reflection after the first gathering that I thought the number of people who were present, in addition to the layout of this room, may have prevented conversations. For the next iteration I need to find a space that is as easily accessible, but has a room that might engender more engagement. (Weiser Fieldnotes, 4/8/18)

The artists worked with those near them but did not engage with others. Therefore, most of the data from the first meeting consisted of my observation notes and the visual data.

The second meeting started off quite awkwardly as well. Claire, a White queer woman, looking down at her artwork, declared, “I used to be so much better at this,” referring to her spatial skills. She was talking to no one in particular. All the other artists, I noted, were engaged in their own work. But Homogoblin, a White woman who is part of the LGBT community, responded to this statement from Claire, postulating, “We’re all just talking to ourselves, or is that just me?” CatsAreBetterThanDogs420, a White queer transman, replied with humor, “I’m just making noises.”

I believe that the awkwardness was intensified by starting with a collaborative event in which many of the individuals felt inadequate. Leia, looking around at the other artists, mused on the “quiet shame” that permeated the room as the artists tried to translate what was in their heads into visual art. Homogoblin expressed that attempting to create art is “really frustrating when [I] get [in my] head what I want it to look like, but I do not have the skills [to] translate it.” This sentiment was shared by many of the artists.
CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 threw his art away several times, restarting his project at least four times. At one point, he remarked that now “I’m just ruining this.” Leia cried out in frustration that “this [her art piece] is incredibly difficult,” while Claire expressed frustration with the limitations of her abilities. She stated that “they’re supposed to, like, open—they’re supposed to nest,” speaking about her piece shown in Figure 4.20. Further, Homogoblin was frustrated with her closet piece (Figure 5.17) because she could not decide where to put the speech bubble. Everywhere she tried to put it, she said, the bubble looked “like I’m farting the words.” For some of the artists, there was frustration around the execution of art skills. Claire, trying to create something three-dimensional, expressed exasperation, stating that she “used to be so much better at spatial things; now I can’t [do what I want to do].”

The art of Sparkle Enby (Figure 5.1), a White queer, trans member of the disabled community, reflected how they manifest their own activism. In this piece, the symbol of a wheelchair (associated with dis/ability rights and pride), is overlaid with masculine and feminine symbols (associated with transgender rights and pride). Below this is the word RESIST. Sparkle Enby used different colors, predominantly green and purple, with purple glitter glue outlining the larger symbol. As a queer trans person with disabilities, Sparkle Enby participates in activism both personal and public. They have led movements for young trans people in the area around SCPWI to help them gain rights, most notably in the public hearings on South Carolina’s version of a bathroom bill.

From my observation notes, I recalled that Sparkle Enby described themself as a “practitioner of high art” (Weiser Observation Notes, 4/9/2018), despite their love of all
art. Other artists thought Sparkle Enby’s skills as an artist were quite conventionally good. Despite this, Sparkle Enby considered themself “meticulous to detriment.” They created an image of the international sign for accessibility intermixed with a trans symbol, denoting their association with the “crip community” (Weiser Observation Notes, 4/9/2018). Even self-proclaimed artists struggled with the creation of art for this project.

Several of the artists experienced stoppages in their work. These reflected their inability to translate their artistic vision to their creations. CatsAreBetterThanDogs420, in particular, spent the entire time working on one piece (Figures 5.2 and 5.3). It didn’t have much detail, but he kept placing the letters “uneven” and then recutting and re-pasting them to a new page. His work largely reflected the March for Our Lives narrative, with a “PSA” from the NRA. For context: On February 14 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, a White gunman took the lives of 17 individuals (Grinberg & Levenson, 2018).
Figure 5.1 Sparkle Enby
In response to the shooting, students from the school organized the March for Our Lives in Washington, DC. The march took place on March 24, with over 800,000 participants.
CatsAreBetterThanDogs420’s piece included the statement “bow to guns own you.” This mesozeugma—a rhetorical device that positions a word in the middle of a sentence so it governs the clauses on both sides (Rhetoricae, 2016)—reflects CatsAreBetterThanDogs420’s feelings about the NRA in the wake of the February 2018 shooting. Beyond just this shooting, many gun deaths were on the minds of these artists, due to the number of communities they identified with, and the wave of gun-related violence in recent years against communities of color and queer and trans communities. I address these concerns below in my discussion of themes.

Like CatsAreBetterThanDogs420, Radically Soft restarted their project several times in an attempt to make it perfect, despite constructive and positive feedback from their best friend, Sparkle Enby, whom they had brought along. Their project (Figure 5.4) includes multiple progressive sayings, including “Don’t Yuck my Yum,” which is a common sex-positive phrase encouraging people to accept others’ sexual expressions (Madsen, 2016). Another statement on their piece was “step up, step back,” which is a common saying among White activists. “Step up” means acting when action is needed, and “step back” means acknowledging privilege and not usurping the movements of communities of Color.

Radically Soft’s statement “Know better. Do better.” is another sentiment geared to individuals who see themselves as allies to oppressed communities. This statement is part of a Maya Angelou quote, which in its entirety reads “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.” I am not positive that Radically Soft knows the source of this statement, but I read it as encouragement to get started with
activism, expressing the sentiment that no one is perfect, and we all have work to do, but we must get started somewhere.

During the second meeting, Makeda’s projects also went through several incarnations—she would make rough drafts, then take what she had learned from those attempts into her final product. Her piece was blue and square, and she inserted a pink scrap of paper on the left, in case the pieces would be bound together. Her piece addressed ways to engage in activism, with envelopes with the words CANVAS! and FUNDRAISE! It also called on activists to “find your community” and included a small mockup of a booklet. The booklet had a cover page that read “INFO” and opened, but it was blank inside.
In my observation, Makeda was the only one who used a rough draft to work toward a final product, rather than starting over from scratch. At the end of the second session I found practice attempts at the booklet described above. Despite also remaking her piece several times, unlike CatsAreBetterThanDogs420, she never outwardly expressed frustration. From my fieldnotes, I recall that

while cleaning up the room, with some of the others, I discovered that Makeda made a practice attempt at her work. After the meeting I found pieces that were reflective of her final project but were not used for anything. This was surprising to me, as many folks expressed frustration at their inability to “get something right” but Makeda just worked along quietly to herself. (Weiser Fieldnotes, 5/7/2018)

Theme 2: Building Community

Subtheme: Vulnerability

While there was awkwardness in the creation of art, I believe that the awkwardness was intensified by starting with a collaborative effort in which many of artists felt inadequate. Homogoblin, at one point while working on her project, turned to me and said that she “liked that you welcome all levels of artistic talent.” The group, which had been in a quiet lull, erupted in laughter. She remarked, laughing, “We’re not just identity inclusive; we’re also terrible artist inclusive.” I also laughed at this statement as I often question my own artistic talents, but also I knew that this statement was important. This statement was important for two reasons. First, it spoke to the acceptance and affirmation of multiple identities in our space. Second, Homogoblin took ownership
of the project/experience as a whole. When she used the words “we’re not”, she signaled a transition from self to group, taking some ownership of the space with her remark about inclusivity of multiple identities and degrees of artistic talent.

Despite these initial challenges, I believe that the awkwardness, vulnerability, and frustration created a shared experience that led individuals to feel more comfortable in the space, and to disclose their thoughts and share with one another. For instance, Claire shared that she had stopped going to counseling due to cost, and Leia jumped in to recommend her counselor, whom she “loved.” Claire shared that her “current anxiety really stems from, like, my PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] from being sexually assaulted and … really, I think my anxiety causes my depression. I think if I could get rid of my anxiety, I wouldn’t be depressed at all, honestly.” This exchange prompted me to ensure that Claire knew what services existed on campus so that she could get any help she might want.

Other artists also shared deeply personal narratives. This sharing began with helping each other aesthetically, such as when D.Prince, who identifies as a heterosexual Black man, used pieces that Makeda, a queer African American woman, was throwing away. Angel_Rainbow_Daisy helped Tēgan, a White woman, craft her quilted piece. There was also verbal encouragement, such as when Homogoblin remarked that Leia’s talent with pop-up books was “so cool!!!”
Subtheme: Peer-to-Peer Support

Peer-to-peer support was largely related to aesthetic collaboration. Representative of this collaboration was Leia’s work as a creative consultant to many of the other artists. Some of the artists created pop-up art such as shown in Figures 4.7, 4.10, 4.20 and 4.21, and Leia had a wealth of experience she used to help her peers. She attempted to teach Claire and Homogoblin, to which Homogoblin replied, “I’ll come to you for tips but try not to bother you too much.” CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 also collaborated with Leia on one piece due to his frustrations (Figure 5.5) in attempting to creating a cake out of paper.

Figure 5.5 CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 and Leia

I address his art at length below. The collaboration to create a cake for his piece on marriage equality came about when CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 admitted that he doesn’t “do art well.” Hearing this, Makeda recalled CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 had shared in the previous meeting that in high school the “yearbook club wouldn’t even let him cut things out.” This exchange helped prompt Leia to assist CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 in realizing his idea for the piece.
This exchange signaled to me that some of the artists were listening to one another, remembering stories about one another across our gatherings. The creation of community and of new relationships is central to my own work, both as an educator and as an activist. This is because I believe that new relationships not only help people support one another in times of activism but also help them teach and learn from one another. Relationships also central to Cahnmann-Taylor’s (2017) third principle of understanding validity in arts-based research. That is The Principle of Impact and Aesthetic Good, and part of this principle is to spend time with other artists working in the same genre. Further, another part of this principle is to always be searching for new ways to create art. Working with one another on this project was one way these artist-activists were able to practice art.

**Subtheme: Interconnectivity and Metaphor**

Noting that vines played a central role in the piece D.Prince made during our first meeting, I asked him why (Figure 5.6). He replied that he felt vines are a “living thing” and that they “sort of passively integrate into whatever, where you are.” He described vines as something you need to stop and “notice the beauty and the interconnectivity of.” This connects with his notion of activism in that “we function different in terms of our own individual activism within the world. But then, obviously, there are a lot of sameness, simultaneously overt things that connect us, that allow us to parallel [one another].”
This interconnectivity through the usage of vines found its way into the final collaborative art (Figure 5.7). Vines connect all the individual pieces; sometimes, these connections are vines made of cakes or hearts, rather than the kudzu vines used in other areas. Whether through kudzu, cakes, or hearts, this vine imagery connects the individual art pieces, and activisms, to one another. This interconnectivity bound together many of the artists’ statements on activism. Interconnectivity, or a drive for relationality, was central to the ways that these artists engaged with their work. Interconnectivity was also reflected in the work by Mark (Figure 5.9), which contains the text “DEFEND AND PROTECT ME TODAY SO THAT I MAY DEFEND AND PROTECT YOU TOMORROW.” This statement reflected a call for interrelationality, or the defense and protection of one another.
When the artists were working on their individual pieces, Makeda asked if the others thought they should connect their pieces, to which Leia said, “Sure!” The conversation on how to connect them then began, with Makeda stating that she wanted to connect them with pom-poms. But as everyone worked on connections between the pieces, Makeda exclaimed, “They all look like vines! We should draw flowers coming off them.” D.Prince and Leia echoed approval of this idea. D.Prince remarked that he was “so pleased that vine is the imagery you went with, because it’s exactly what I was thinking.” To which Makeda said that they were on the same wave—she and D.Prince said “wave” simultaneously.

In our third gathering, Makeda shared that when she thought of vines, she thought of kudzu. Vines “take over anything … you know, architecture. Climbing up the walls or whatever. And I’m thinking of kudzu, really.” This notion of “taking over,” expressed through vines, is aesthetically interesting. When Makeda mentioned that she was thinking of kudzu, D.Prince jumped in and stated that he, too, had been thinking of kudzu. Kudzu is an invasive species from Asia common in the Southeast and is also sometimes known as “the vine that ate the south” (Chalakoski, 2017). This metaphor was deep for me, leading me to think of myself as an invasive species, a carpetbagger. During the antebellum period, carpetbaggers were northerners who came to take advantage of the South. The term is often deployed now to describe new residents who meddle in business or politics (Collins English Dictionaries, 2014).
As someone from the northern part of the country living and working down South, I have no organic, natural connection here. I was transplanted by happenstance. I address issues of regionality, and in particular the South and carpetbaggers, later on.

Ladybug (a White man) noted that while “kudzu is ugly,” earlier that day he had noticed that “the stretch behind the train tracks up above [student entertainment district] is just covered in kudzu” and “the sun was hitting it just right. It’s really cool.” For Ladybug, the “natural beauty” of the state and “not the ideology” of its people is what comes to mind when he thinks of why he loves the state.
The notion of being interconnected was woven into the artists’ experiences of activism, as well. As for many activists before them (Askins, 2009; G. Brown & Pickerill, 2009; Collin, 2014), interconnectivity and interpersonal relationships played a role in sustaining their activations. This interconnectivity found its way into the artwork in the form of vines. Being able to challenge, change, and subvert these oppressive structures is central to arts-based research (Leavy, 2017), queer theory (Warner, 1993), and more largely this project. I see the metaphor of vines as a rich image, as vines can both be destructive and also hold structures together.

**Intersectional work.**

Interconnectivity as symbol and metaphor was important in making meaning about resistance and activism. For Leia, interconnectivity was a part of active resistance as well. Leia’s art included the words “There is no wrong way to do activism — as long as it’s intersectional,” “Invoke Change,” “Collaborate,” and “Coordinate.”

Figure 5.8 Leia How To
The work by Mark, an African American man, reflected the idea of interconnectivity in resistance as well. He wrote, “DEFEND AND PROTECT ME TODAY SO THAT I MAY DEFEND AND PROTECT YOU TOMORROW.”

Figure 5.9 Mark

Mothman (a White genderqueer person) and Ladybug expressed a deep desire for community within their activism. They created a visual poem (Figure 5.10) about the state of activism, with symbols throughout the piece accompanying the words. It reads as follows:
History is **guts**

Wealth is **brutality**

Power Hypnotizes

Resent Economy

Not Free

Hear it

See it …

Write!

Yell!

Work!

Breed Real Rebels

Is it counter culture?

Is it equality

Oppose → Assemble → Protest

Fight Fascism
Cultivate All

You with I

Cosmic Commune

Mothman described the poem as expressing that activism is inspired by history, and acknowledging that we must recognize the “amount of people that have died via the power of the oppressors … I don’t think that’s acknowledged enough.” Moreover, Mothman argued that “wealth is actually one of the guiding forces in creating” oppression, and that wealth inequality is one of the reasons activists should resent the economy. That power hypnotizes “is an obvious sentiment,” according to Mothman. The next section in the poem— “Write! Yell! Work!”—expressed Mothman’s philosophy of countering oppression.

In the middle of the visual poem is a flag, ripped and burned. It is the flag of the southern cross from the Civil War, a battle flag of the Confederacy from the army in northern Virginia. Often, this flag is called “the Confederate flag” or “the Rebel flag”. Mothman argued that the Confederate flag is a “really aggressive part of southern culture and … a stand-in for oppression.” The next line in the poem, about breeding “REAL REBELS”, is a “comment on the rebel flag.” The closing part of Mothman’s work is about finding that “Cosmic Commune” to breed real rebels to fight oppression. Mothman stated that “one of the most effective ways of activism and something I’ve done in fighting in activism … comes down to, like, when you find a community [where you]
join together.” Though Mothman and Ladybug are from South Carolina, they actively rejected the stereotypes of southern Whiteness. They both struggled with the way that the “grand culture at [SCPWI]” reflected an “assimilation into the southern good old boy culture.”

For Mothman and Ladybug, countering capitalism was central to their work. On the campus of SCPWI, they helped found the Young Democratic Socialists (YDS) chapter, the student wing of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). Mothman had been kicked out of the College Democrats for “being too left, and wanted to start up a leftist organization. Ladybug was starting YDS … and that’s how we met.” Because capitalism engenders inherent inequality, Mothman’s rejection of capitalism reflects a commitment to justice. Moreover, it is a tacit rejection of how “activism has been commodified” and “trapped up in markets.” These attempts at interconnectivity through seeking justice were what drove Mothman to seek other progressive individuals that fed their activism, and in part drove their student leadership experience of starting an organization at SCPWI. Mothman struggled to find others at SCPWI who believed in the same notions of equality and rejecting capitalism. Their relationship to activism, as shared through Mothman’s journey to the YDS, is one of searching out others to connect with, to continue to fuel their activism.
Mothman’s drive to build relationships with others on campus echoed the experiences of other artists involved in the project. Some of the artists engaged in activism to build connections and relationships and other artists who were activists sought but struggled to build relationships with potential activists. Bailey (2017) and Webb (2017) found that
activism was driven by interrelationality. Some of the artists’ experiences reflect their argument.

In starting the YDS chapter, Mothman’s hope was to begin to create this cosmic commune and challenge “racism and sexual assault on and off campus, especially in [student bar area]. That’s a big thing.” YDS was also looking into echoing work done on other campuses to pressure universities to “to stop using sweatshops—you know, [stop] supporting people making merchandise with sweatshop labor.” Further, members of YDS hoped to challenge racial discrimination in campus admissions and campus labor. For Mothman, “it kind of feels like a country club here [at SCPWI].”

Mothman defined a Cosmic Commune as an important step for “justice,” a commune being “an equal-footing living space.” Cosmic is an idea of “international or long-standing space and time, to think about us … not only like a national thing, but one that will be long-standing, for as long as the community wants it to be.” Ladybug contributed that the notion of a cosmic commune makes him think how you want your activism to be grounded in community and the realities on the ground. But it’s also useful to think about the cosmology of your society and how it affects … your relationships. I think generally, you know, our cosmology here in the United States is pretty bleak. And so, I guess for me … a cosmic commune … would be like a group of people who share … instead of a bleak [cosmology] and, like, a dystopian cosmology, what we have now— [a cosmic commune] is something that unites people, and it creates meaning in our lives.
Mothman and Ladybug felt that a large part of activism and “a lot of our relationships are sort of trapped in markets and [are], like, contractual” or transactional, that “activism [is] being commodified.” Ladybug explicitly framed the notion of a cosmic commune as something “that would be in my mind … something that was outside of a market or commodified space.”

The notion of a cosmic commune resonated with D.Prince, who related the concept to the way that he “deliberately [tries to] think about it [the notion of interconnectivity] on a day to day [basis it’s] is the level of empathy I really had.” D.Prince commented that he “really dig[s] the whole cosmic commune concept, in that … we need to be able to acknowledge and appreciate everyone’s uniqueness and still understand that we can be together about it.” D.Prince used driving to expand the metaphor of interconnectivity and a Cosmic Commune. He described how if he was driving and the person in front of me is going, I don’t know, five or 10 miles under the speed limit … you’re like, ‘What are you doing?!’ And then I catch myself sometimes and I’m like, ‘Yo, remember a week ago when you were in X Y Z place and you didn’t know where you were going? You were trying to figure out how to turn left or right or which one was going to get you where you need to go faster.’ Like, I’m sure you would have appreciated the person behind you not being ticked off about it. You know <pauses> things like that. But it it’s a chronic thing, it’s a buildup, it turns into how we conduct ourselves politically and professionally and everything that we do.

Subtheme: Quilting Together Support
Despite a lack of personal confidence, the artists were congratulatory toward and supportive of one another, remarking on how exciting and wonderful others’ works were turning out. Many called one another’s creations “beautiful.” D.Prince remarked on how deeply the artists were resonating with one another, stating, “I think it’s sort of what we’ve all been echoing. It’s like there’s this interrelation that we have with people even if it doesn’t directly, quote-unquote, directly involve you.” Leia (a White woman) expressed how she appreciated Homogoblin’s and CatsAreBetterThanDogs420’s “enthusiasm of [her] artistic abilities.” Homogoblin remarked how great Claire’s piece turned out, exclaiming, “Hey, look at that! You got a little thing!” I think these comments and shared frustrations helped build connections across our group. This was made manifest in the group’s final collaborative piece, an integrated quilt representative of all their activism (Figure 5.7).

The quilt idea was initially proposed by Radically Soft, a Jewish, White, queer, nonbinary, neurodivergent artist during the first meeting and was echoed by many of the other artists. Leia proposed making multiple pieces and later combining them; Sparkle Enby supported this idea. For this reason, the art sessions produced 21 distinct pieces of art and one collaborative piece that combined several of the other pieces.

The collaborative nature of the project mostly fell apart in the first meeting, and I believe that this was due to the large number of people in attendance (14). The second gathering, which had only six artists, was able to better coalesce. The quilt format was brought up again by Claire, who said that the artists could make a “quilt and we all make a patch.” The second meeting largely consisted of the creation of these patches, with
seven different patches being created during this time (Figures 5.5, 5.11, 5.13, 5.14, 5.15, 5.16, 5.17), reflecting the activism in which each of these individuals participates.

Makeda (Figure 5.11) created an activism how-to patch on the various ways to engage with activism, such as Canvas!, Find Your Community, Raise Awareness, and Make Game Plan. Reading from top to bottom, left to right, the first suggestion is to find one’s community, echoing a theme of building community that recurred throughout the artists’ work. Beyond community, Makeda also spoke about making a list of demands, making game plans, raising awareness, fundraising, learning and teaching information, and canvassing. This piece was reminiscent of the piece Leia made (Figure 5.8) at the first meeting, which also addressed the nuts and bolts of activism. The two artists were sitting across the room from one another, so it is unlikely that these pieces influenced one another, but they do echo one another.

Figure 5.11 Makeda

Tēgan created a piece (Figure 5.12) that suggested a quilt, with many different-sized patches interconnecting. On this work were the phrases Zap Obstacles and Serve.
These two phrases make up her definition of activism. The notion of service as a form of activism is well documented in the literature (Harré, 2007). Further, this piece unintentionally reflects the idea of the quilt that these artists eventually created as their final piece.

Claire created a three-dimensional “hidey thing” (Figure 5.13), in which she spoke about her various forms of activism and how they were all largely hidden. This piece used advanced paper-crafting to create a three-dimensional object that could fold into itself. I address this piece at length below. Claire’s activism was represented as inside a “hidey thing” that in some respects looks like a flower, echoing her desire to “bloom.” Inside the petals are the four things that keep her grounded, but there is another layer hiding the word activism. According to Claire’s art, her activism is hidden beneath many layers.
In addition to the NRA art, CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 created the simple statement “Gender Sucks” (Figure 5.14), with reflective purple tape separating the words *Gender* and *Sucks*. Each letter was cut from a word, making the letters themselves detached from one another. The letters were printed on a black sticker and placed on a black background—this is hard to make out, and it is unclear whether that was intentional.
CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 talked about gender identity and the way that it has informed his life. CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 has a sister who is older by five years, and when she was figuring out her own sexuality, it prompted CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 to begin his own exploration of sexuality. He came out to his dad in his freshman year of high school, telling his father that he was interested in women. His father “was just kind of like, ‘I guess. OK.’”

“And then, my senior year of high school, I came out as trans and he was like, [hesitantly] ‘I don’t know about that one.’ [laughing] He still don’t know about that one!”

Sky Blue Banana, a Jewish woman of African descent, created a piece (Figure 5.15) that reflected her love and concern for community. She made a dark-green heart out of glitter glue on a green background. This heart is made of swirls, so the love expressed by the words surrounding the heart (“CARE FOR YOUR COMMUNITY” and “GIVE A
SHIT” seems to be drawn into the center of the heart. This concern for empathy and community was also a very common theme throughout much of the art.

Figure 5.15 Sky Blue Banana
Leia’s work (Figure 5.16) was a graduation cap with writing on it, speaking to her impending graduation from SCPWI. Leia’s work also concerned, in part, empathy for others.
Figure 5.16 Leia 3
Homogoblin created (Figure 5.17) a yellow three-dimensional person popping out of a red closet on a patterned field and proclaiming, “COME OUT OF THE CLOSET!” Also, on this piece were the words “be unabashedly YOURSELF.” The figure of the person is yelling; this is evident both in the shape of its mouth and also in the use of capital letters in “COME OUT OF THE CLOSET!”

Figure 5.17 Homogoblin
These pieces by Homogoblin, CatsAreBetterThanDogs420, Leia, Makeda, Sky Blue Banana, and Claire ultimately became patches in the collaborative piece the artists assembled at the third meeting (Figure 5.7). The symbolism of a quilt was not lost on many of the artists, and Makeda remarked:

I really liked that it ended up taking the form of a quilt, because I really wanted it to last week. But I wasn’t, like, pushing it … You know, quilts have—well, in African American communities, [they] have—an important symbolism … They tell stories. I mean, they sometimes are literally lifesaving … You knew how to go where you needed to go—like, on the Underground Railroad and stuff like that … I just really like the idea of our collaborative piece being a quilt.

I, too, was struck by the quilting and its symbolism. I remarked on the centrality of quilts, such as the AIDS quilt of the 1980s, in queer communities. I let Makeda know that the AIDS quilt “covered the entire National Mall in DC” at the Millennium March on Washington in 2000 to commemorate those whose lives had been lost to AIDS. Makeda had never heard of it but was very interested. Leia told her that “you gotta look it up; it’s crazy.” Quilts have long served oppressed communities as a form of art and expression. This final piece joined the different manifestations of art as one collaborative quilt. The physical joining of these pieces seems to me reminiscent of the interconnectivity that was so important for these artists within their activisms. Within this theme, the dominant emotion was the interest in building relationships and community. Many of the desires expressed to build community for support and resistance was in response to apprehension and fear in the political reality of the moment. Desire for community informed my
analysis but was not the only element that informed my analysis and representation of this theme.

**Theme 3: Distance in Families of Birth**

**Subtheme: Queer Identity and Strain in Conservative Families**

Family was a significant aspect of their lives for many of these artists. For Claire, family meant parents and manifested in tension and a not-insignificant amount of pain. For Claire and others such as Makeda and Ladybug, sometimes the biggest manifestation of outspoken activism was in challenging the oppressive behaviors and actions of family members. Homogoblin spoke openly about her struggles being from a conservative family and in a relationship with another woman. Claire, Homogoblin’s partner, described Homogoblin’s family as “pretty fundamentalist [Christians].” They “tolerate” their daughter’s sexuality, she said, but aren’t supportive. But Claire expressed through her art frustration with her family as well. Claire addressed her family in her first piece of art. On this piece is a column of figures that look like puzzle pieces. All the pieces have writing within them. On two pieces, Claire addressed tensions with her family: “You should have (insert any alternative to any decision my mother didn’t agree with).” “Just wanted to let you know that this gathering is conservative, so just make sure to tone it down.”

Homogoblin shared that she and Claire were planning on getting married in about nine months, in December 2018. Homogoblin had “not told them yet” and expressed anxiety about this. She stated with wide-eyed anticipation, and a bit of ire, that she would “see how that goes.”
The discussion of same-sex sexuality and conservative families elicited a conversation among Homogoblin, Claire, and Leia.

Claire: So, I met them [Homogoblin’s family] a year and a half ago. Yeah. So, we’re working on that.

Homogoblin: They’re supportive? *trails off and up as if asking a question*

Claire: I would not call them supportive—if [anything] they’re … *searching for the word* … I would call them very tolerant.

Homogoblin: OK, maybe the better word [is] tolerant, which is kind of gross—makes me feel like something bad.

Leia: Like, ‘Yeah, I’ll allow it.’

Family tension regarding sexuality was common in these artists’ lived experiences and played a role in the way they enacted their activisms. Many of the artists were engaged in activisms regarding LGBT justice, either as members of L, G, B, and/or T communities or as heterosexual allies.

Homogoblin’s art (Figures 5.17 and 5.18) was very much informed by her sexuality and her relationships with her family, and by the general politically conservative surroundings she finds herself in most often. The first piece she created (Figure 5.18), with several three-dimensional human figures standing up on the field, consists of messages she has received from her family. Most of the figures are unembellished cutouts, but one is colored in like the rainbow flag and has a bowtie. This
rainbow human represents Homogoblin, holding hands with her family members. These figures are standing on sentiments that she has had about her family.

Figure 5.18 Homogoblin

These sentiments were varied but were all about her sexuality and her partner. The messages, largely in order from the top of the page to the bottom, are below.

I came out to my family and they didn’t reject me
My family secretly dislikes my partner

My family gets along with my partner

I fucking hate my family

I can stand up to my family

My family has hurt me

My mom calls my partner my “friend”

My mom is homophobic

I love my family. I can change my family’s perception of LGBT+ people!

I can’t change my family

I’m not perfect

I can show my family that I am OK

I’m afraid to tell my family I’m getting married

I am trying to be my most authentic self

My family is trying

I am a lesbian

I love myself

I don’t trust myself
My family hates who I am

My therapist says I can’t change their mind

My family love me

My family is not perfect

My family is capable of CHANGE

My mom is trying

Both Homogoblin and Claire struggle with Homogoblin’s family’s ultraconservative positions regarding sexuality and Christianity. Homogoblin’s other piece (Figure 5.17) also centers a queered sexuality, with a three-dimensional figure bursting out of a closet. The words on the piece state, “be unabashedly YOURSELF.” The figure in the closet has a text balloon: “COME OUT OF THE CLOSET!” Her second piece was created during the second meeting, a few weeks after the initial piece. Homogoblin expressed to me that through her engagement in this project, she had been inspired to reexamine her activism. This project helped her understand that “you don’t have to be out in the streets protesting or something to call yourself an activist,” and that since our first time together, she feels

Homogoblin: Like I can definitely be, I guess, more vocal, because even the thing I made last time was … really, like, about my family, because I feel like they’re all very conservative.

Pretty much—I don’t know if you’d call them
fundamentalist Christians, but you might as well … close enough.

CatsAreBetterThanDogs420: If the shoe fits [trails off]

Homogoblin: I mean, it kinda does. You know, like, southern Bible Belt sort of traditional … So yeah, they’re not … they could be a lot worse. I am honestly very surprised and grateful that they’re … not, you know, disowning me. I feel kind of lucky in that regard, especially thinking about a lot of our people. So, I just kind of made it about … like, little things. I feel like with me it is just sort of being myself around people that I don’t know, people that I do know. That’s kind of my level of activism right now.

While Homogoblin struggled with connecting with her family because they were unaccepting of her sexuality, she was unwilling to condemn them verbally, even if her artwork reflected that she “fucking hate[ed] her family.” This reflects that Homogoblin’s survival was a large part of her activism. Homogoblin had just recently come out, so she was working through relationships with her family. This had an impact on how engaged she could be, particularly in her contexts, because the LGBT community in the city where SCPWI is located is made up largely of students or older and coupled individuals. Homogoblin, a recent graduate, fell between these two communities, which may have added to her isolation and alienation. This isolation and alienation is an inversion of the interconnectedness that I spoke about in Theme 2 that drove some of the activism of some of the other artists. Where a drive for relationships drove artists such as D.Prince
and Mothman’s activism, homophobia and heterosexism and the resultant isolation and alienation Homogoblin experienced inhibited her activism. She described the figure coming out of the closet in her second piece (Figure 5.17) as a “little alien man” and spoke of her work with the church as “kind of, like, alienating.” The notion of alienation is salient in her work. Being alienated from communities, lacking interconnectivity, may also be a motive to find and create community, perhaps around issues of justice.

Subtheme: Sibling Distance

A disjointed relationship with family members due to queer sexuality was not uncommon. This was a struggle for CatsAreBetterThanDogs420, as I shared earlier. Despite the fact that his older sister also questioned her sexuality, CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 never was able to confide in his sister. He discovered that she was questioning “because she would leave herself logged into stuff on the computer and she wouldn’t shut” off her computer. CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 laughingly admitted that he “was a nosey little brother” and that he looked into what his older sister was doing on the computer. He contended that his sister “knew what she was doing. I think she wanted someone to, like, find out that she was … questioning her sexuality,” he said.

Leia responded to CatsAreBetterThanDogs420, offering, “It would have been kinda nice to have some conversation during that process. [trails off]” But CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 admitted that while that was “true,” he did not think his sister would have been open to it, as “she doesn’t like talking about it [identity].” For him, this was “really weird, and, like, I’m very open about it. If someone has a question,
I’ll answer it.” Claire remarked, “My sister is like that, too. She gets very defensive if I try to have an open dialogue with her about anything.” Moreover, Claire expressed confusion that her sister was not as open to talking about issues of identity. Claire stated, “[I] thought that I was always very open with her, and I was like, ‘How come it didn’t pass down to you?’ I think it’s interesting.”

Some of these artists wanted to engage their siblings in deep and meaningful conversations regarding sexuality or other topics, but this desire had not been fulfilled. I believe that this is another impetus for finding meaningful relationships beyond familial ties. Tolerance, as an inversion of admiration was a dominant emotion here among this theme for the artists. Tolerance from their families, and to their families. This is further expanded in the subtheme below, where some of these artists push back on tolerance.

**Subtheme: Political Strain—Battling Conservative Ideologies**

Politics also caused some of these activists’ tension with their families and their partner’s families. Ladybug stated that he “interrupts bigots [referring] back to [Mothman]’s poem, confronting them with the history, and history that they lived through.” He said that ultimately this becomes “uncomfortable” when “offering up definitions of history operating off different moral codes.” He argued that “the conversation has to get there eventually, because that’s what we’re dealing with: different perceptions of reality that are formed by interpretations of history and things like that.”

Mothman spoke on how they have confronted bigotry from their grandparents their whole life. Mothman told the story of the first time Ladybug met their grandparents. Mothman states that their grandparents are “very … conservative.”
Mothman: I have tried to confront them my whole life, and we’ve had fights since I can’t remember and…Ladybug’s the first person to, like, school my grandfather on his history. And that was, like, the first time you [looking at Ladybug] had met my family. And you… basically called him a fascist. I mean, like, my grandfather loves Ladybug now.

Ladybug: He was a good sport about it.

[all laughing]

D.Prince: [laughing] He took it in stride.

For some of these artists, confronting family was central to their work. Ladybug explicitly spoke about coming from a conservative family in the western foothills region of the state, and how from an early age he learned to handle the conflict between his progressive ideology and his family’s conservative politics.

D.Prince shared that he enjoyed challenging bigotry by “using whatever logic they [those espousing bigoted statements] used against them.” Later in our conversations, Ladybug said he believed that he draws on a similar technique for interrupting bigotry.

Ladybug explained how he used this technique with his stepfather.

Ladybug: Kind of tying into what you [D.Prince] said a little bit earlier about, like, flipping the script on people in your life and interrupting bigots using their logic—I think…one of the main
things that’s deployed against, you know, people espousing White progressive politics is, like— “the snowflake.”

D.Prince: Ugh.
Ladybug: And I think, kind of looking at what you are talking about… people who say that—like you [Leia] said, for some reason they’ve [people with privilege] never thought about these things [privilege and oppression], because they never had to. And the first time they hear about it, the frustration and, you know, defensiveness and anger, and they lash out.

D.Prince: In an unbridled emotional response.
Ladybug: Yeah, like, their moral worldview [collapses]. I mean, they completely melt down when exposed to the lived experiences of others. And … I had to tell my stepdad this, like, ‘Nah, you’re the snowflake! You can’t handle just being told about these things that other people have to live with every day.’

The term snowflake is derived from a quote from the film Fight Club, in which one of the main characters said, “You are not special. You’re not a beautiful and unique snowflake. You’re the same decaying organic matter as everything else” (Fincher, 1999). This term is often deployed against millennials and activists professing inclusive values, and in many ways, it is a new way of levying as an insult the idea of being politically correct. Here, we see D.Prince and Ladybug complicating this naming and showing how even those who might profess White supremacist and racist views have some of the same qualities often singled out in “generation snowflake” (Fox, 2016). This inversion of the
deployment of snowflake is a rejection of the term, but also a redirection that illustrates how it is not only the political left that expresses sensitivities. The political right has these tendencies as well.

Makeda spoke about how she struggled to problematize her family members’ oppressive behavior. However, Makeda felt that she had far more success in “calling people out when they say fucked up shit” if those individuals were part of her family than if they were not. To her, calling out family members for saying bigoted things was “more important sometimes than calling out strangers, because strangers don’t care what, you know, Joe off the street says.” Calling out a “family member—I think that’s more powerful,” she shared. Moving from tolerance, some of these artists saw in this tolerance from families as an opportunity for indignation and resistance, and used this to challenge what they saw as “fucked up shit”

**Theme 4: Resistance to Oppression**

This project is largely concerned with the experiences of millennial activists, and thus resistance to oppression came up in a multitude of ways. Artists illustrated their resistance through their art and also through their conversations with one another.

**Subtheme: Identity**

Angel_Rainbow_Daisy, a first-generation American, Latinx woman, had art on both sides of her paper (Figure 5.19 and 5.23). One side (Figure 5.19) was filled with hashtags, reflecting the social media element of her activism. These hashtags reflected
her personal activisms—specifically, activism that centers the immigrant experience. 

#ISTANDWITHIMMIGRANTS, #BROWNISBEAUTIFUL, #LATINAPower, and #LATINXPPOWER created a border for this piece of art. In the middle of the page are two narratives, outlined here.

“‘When Mexico sends their people …’ IMMIGRANTS WE GET THE JOB DONE! ‘BAD HOMBRES’ pick the food we all eat … ‘BAD HOMBRES’ leave their homes behind to provide for entire family. ‘BAD HOMBRE’? TAKE A LOOK IN THE MIRROR!” These phrases are clearly in response to many of the egregious statements presidential candidate and now-President Donald Trump made about Mexicans and individuals of South or Central American descent (see Appendix C for comments by Trump).

Figure 5.19 Angel_Rainbow_Daisy 2

Angel_Rainbow_Daisy’s second piece was a poem in Spanish and English:

Lucha Por Tus Derechos

Las mujeres de mi raza son hermosas.
Con su pelo largo, negro, y ojos oscuros.

Eres bella. Eres fuerte. Eres todo lo que te dicen que no puedes ser.

We are not ‘fiesty’. We are not ‘spicy’.

We are fighters. We are luchadores.

We carry the weight of the world on our shoulders + fight for what is right.

This many-layered work reflects her work with immigrant communities: “We are fighters. We are luchadores.” “We are fighters. We are luchadores.” also echoed in her choice of hashtags (“#ISTANDWITHIMMIGRANTS” and “Immigrants we get the job done!”). The work also represented her commitment to feminism: “Las mujeres de mi raza son hermosas” and “Eres todo lo que te dicen que no puedes ser”, by centering the narratives of Latinx women, and reflecting her resistance to Western beauty standards and how Latinx women are scripted as “feisty” and “spicy.”

Homogoblin’s piece (Figure 5.18) centered her identity as a member of the LGBT community. This is more than just metaphor, as the figure representing her, colored in with a rainbow flag, sits in the center of her work. As described in detail above in Theme 3, this figure is standing on oppressive statements by her family and others who do not support her as a member of the LGBT community.

Sparkle Enby’s work also centered their activism within their identity, as their art conjoins the international symbol for dis/ability and the symbol for trans pride. Moreover, right below the symbols, the word resist was centered on the page, signifying active
resistance to an ableist cisgender agenda that decenters the narratives of trans individuals and/or individuals with disabilities. In Chapter 1, I addressed specific attacks by the Trump administration on LGBT communities. Trump has also expressed open disdain of those with disabilities, mocking a journalist for having a congenital joint condition (BBC, 2015). For these reasons, Sparkle Enby’s call for an inclusive resistance to Trump is poignant.

Mark, an African American man, also reflects identity-based activism in his work. He drew an image of a peace sign, also reflective of a rocket ship. Below this are the words “I get it … We are different. Now let’s blend together.” I understand this message as reflecting the idea of the United States as a melting pot, with individuals coming together to create a new whole. Although there are anti-assimilationist critiques of the idea of melting pot, the art serves to highlight a rejection of Trump’s policies, which attempt to divide individuals and communities, rather than bind them together.

CatsAreBetternThanDogs420, a transman, also emphasized identity, and in particular his frustrations with gender, in one of his pieces made during our second gathering (Figure 5.14). This simple piece states that “gender sucks.” Short, simple, and elegant, it reflected his feelings and struggles with his gender identity over the years.

Mothman, a White genderqueer demigirl, stated that “[I] try to guide my activism around thinking about everything as a power structure—that’s what really moves me.” These power structures are rooted in and tied directly to White supremacist “racist structures” that reinforce “hegemonic dynamics” according to Mothman. Their visual poem addressed their identity as a southerner and a socialist and, through the use of
symbols, how these identities interplay with their identities as queer and genderqueer. While the piece is a visual poem, the references to identity are made through symbols (Confederate flag, Queer socialist symbol), whereas the elements of resistance to White supremacist and capitalist structures are in words. To me, this is compelling because it reflects the use of in-community language; unless outside viewers are aware of these symbols, the meanings might be lost on them.

D.Prince’s faith manifested as a point of tension for him. He expressed that he identifies “as Christian, and something that I’m dealing with, especially in an activist realm, is (trails off) I feel like oftentimes, you know, Christianity is one of those religions with a history of a lot of oppressors.” This tension between being Christian, a religion with oppression embedded its history, and being an activist for many communities was also vehemently echoed by Makeda. For these two individuals, faith was very important, but they also acknowledged the ways that the same faith has been used as a tool of oppression.

For these artists, pride in their own identity was a salient aspect of this theme. Whether it was a pride of identity resisting dominant narratives such as expressed by Angel_Rainbow_Daisy, or the tension of being proud of Christian commitments even as Christianity is a religion with a history of oppression. These artists were proud of who they were and the work that they were doing.

Facing hegemonic dynamics was something that arose for Leia, who spoke about taking courses with Professor [Smith] at SCPWI. Professor [Smith] told a female veteran in class that “women were too weak and feeble to be in the military and that she doesn’t
deserve the honor of being a veteran.” In another class with the same professor, Leia heard him argue that “‘Islamic women…moving away from religious conservatism is what caused 9/11.’ He was like, ‘Women being too slutty will…causes terrorism.’” According to Leia, the class was in an uproar about these racist, misogynist statements, but nothing ever happened to the professor.

Subtheme: Political Resistance

The contemporary political era certainly played a role in the art of these individuals. Much of their activism engendered by the artists were either prompted or reinforced by a need to resist the Trump presidency. The term resist, contemporarily associated with resistance to the Trump presidency, appeared in three different pieces of art: Sparkle Enby’s (Figure 5.1), Leia’s (Figure 5.8), and Mothman and Ladybug’s poem (Figure 5.10). Makeda created a “Trump-o’-lantern” “emanating these evil red vibes” (Figure 5.20). Her art reflected her feelings “kind of negative…how I see things, kind of sad and violent and distressing.” The figure that resembles planet Earth on her work was not originally meant to be Earth, but

then I made this and it kind of looks like the Earth. I didn’t mean [it] to be like that, but it kind of looks like that. And I just put that in a heart…like, OK, so this is the world and all the bad stuff. And then there’s, like, my community and love and coalition and music and conversations and a heart. And now…the good things being shielded or sending out beams into the world and, like, maybe [trying] to change things.
Likewise, Angel_Rainbow_Daisy’s piece (Figure 5.19) directly references Trump with the use of *bad hombres*—a phrase he used to describe Mexican immigrants during a presidential debate (Moreno, 2016). This artistic creation by Angel_Rainbow_Daisy directly challenges the narratives espoused by the Trump administration, changing the original message of statements such as *bad hombres* and *when Mexico sends their people*. Trump said, “When Mexico sends their people, they’re not sending the best. They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems” (Young, 2016, p. n.p.). Angel_Rainbow_Daisy subverts this message when she said, “Immigrants we get the job done!”—a clear reference, to the work of Lin-Manuel Miranda’s *Hamilton*. Finally, she closed out this section by turning the phrase *bad hombre* on its head, asking Trump to look in the mirror to see a bad hombre.

Mark referenced the tenuous international relations of the current moment in his piece. Drawing a nuclear symbol, he wrote, “Destroying nations ends the conversation.” At the time of this project, the threat of international nuclear was higher than it has been since the Cold War. This is due largely to the president’s tweeting about and making fun of Kim Jong Un, calling him “little rocket man” (Associated Press, 2017). Further, Mark expressed that “freedom isn’t free. But it could be. But it should be. And if we change it would be.” (Figure 5.9). This piece by Mark perhaps references the escalating tensions between North Korea and the United States. Moreover, I think it is reminiscent of the song by Michael Jackson “Man in the Mirror.” In this song, Jackson sings, “If you want to make the world a better place/Take a look at yourself, and then make a change” (*Michael Jackson*, 2012). Mark’s work, I feel, expresses that we, too, as activists need to make changes.
The first piece by Leia was created out of a poster she made for the March for Our Lives, which she turned into a zine about the experience. She didn’t create it for this project, but for one of her women studies courses. She thought I might be interested in it and might be able to incorporate it into the project. On one side it says, “NRA You Have Blood On Your Hands,” with “NRA” and “Blood” in red ink, looking as if they are dripping blood. On the other side is a five-page zine (see Appendix D). In this zine, Leia cited the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee position paper, which reads, “The United States Government has never guaranteed the freedom of oppressed citizens and is not yet truly determined to end the rule of terror and oppression within its own borders” (Forman, 1972, p. 445). This aligns with a statement from the March for Our Lives by Emma Gonzalez, who said that you must fight for your life before it’s somebody else’s job. Leia argues that “it doesn’t seem as if much has changed.” This piece acknowledged the beauty of hearing from young people, who are already tired “from their fears of going to school, united with the elders of the protest movement” against a political moment that seems to value profits and guns over lives.

After the shooting at Marjory Stoneman, there was movement on the political right, and by Trump, to consider arming teachers (Gunter, 2018). This conversation sparked a hashtag, #ArmMeWith, largely used by teachers and educators asking for what they need in classrooms, such as computers, better pay, science equipment, and a plethora of other such items. Instead, the conversation among political leaders was centered on arming teachers. This is reminiscent of a statement by Secretary of Education DeVos, who during her confirmation hearings remarked that it was important to arm teachers so they could defend themselves and students from “grizzly bears” (Jamieson, 2017). This
push to arm teachers and other educators ignores the concerns that many educators seem to have about having guns in the classroom (Gunter, 2018).

These resistances to the NRA was also reflected in CatsAreBetterThanDogs420’s art (Figures 5.2 and 5.3), in which he creates a mock NRA PSA, “BOW TO GUNS OWN YOU.” Leia and CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 explicitly spoke to frustration with the ineffectiveness of the government to make any moves on guns, despite how many people fall victim to gun crimes on a regular basis. D.Prince, too, tied issues of gun ownership into his argument. He spoke on the ways he inverts the logic of bigots who don’t seem to care about any of the amendments to the U.S. Constitution except the second one, which states, “a well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.” D.Prince expressed frustration that these people “pull that uh uh duh,” not knowing how to respond to activists who question their motives.

Claire spoke about her inability to build relationships in her classes, due in part to having perspectives that diverge from the rest of her peers’. In particular, Claire expressed frustration with the Supreme Court’s rulings on hate crimes, stating that the Court “has a really rough track record with ruling correctly in hate crime cases” and expressing astonishment that her peers in class agreed with the rulings of the “Supreme Court and, like, its bullshit, arbitrary interpretation of our constitution.” Her resistance to the political leanings of her academic peers resulted in some “backlash,” she said. She lamented a conservative leaning among her peers, stating that “it’s a little disconcerting sometimes.”
Mothman also expressed frustration with the U.S. government. Mothman believed that “the source of a lot of hate crimes in America is…the fact that we, like, praise freedom of speech and allow hate speech” to be “protected relentlessly.” Makeda agreed with this statement, echoing what Mothman said.

For Leia, making others uncomfortable was central to her resistance to oppression, and this was illustrated in her graduation cap art (Figure 5.16), which contains words that she imagines being said to an incoming SCPWI student. Part of this sarcastic spiel was to not “question current power statuses” and “never make anyone uncomfortable.” Leia’s political resistance was to the larger political structures, such as the U.S. government, but she also levied critiques against more micro structures, such as SCPWI and some of its faculty.

While this theme was not explicitly about emotions, emotions ran throughout the resistances to oppressions that were espoused by these artists. The artists expressed disbelief in many of the sentiments of their peers, such as those expressed by Leia, Mothman, and Claire. Moreover, there were expressions of distress shared by the artists as they addressed inequity and injustice. In addition, Leia shared that she enjoyed making others uncomfortable when she confronted oppression. I interpreted Mark’s piece (Figure 5.9) that spoke to defending others as reflective of his feelings of protection toward other targeted individuals and communities and his desire to see cross-group support, others coming to his aid one day. Angel_Rainbow_Daisy spoke in direct resistance to many statements that are distressing to many people. Further, Claire recounted how she felt unable to build relationships in class due to distressing statements her peers made.
Makeda stated explicitly that her piece (Figure 5.20) reflected the contemporary moment which was “sad and violent and distressing”.

**Theme 5: Emotion**

Many emotions were expressed by the artists in this project. Emotions and various subcodes make up the majority of the codes assigned during this project. The emotions represented were a dominant theme in this project. For emotions and the subcodes, I was attentive to tone and expression, as well as words. The items in this section are representative of both elicited emotions and shared emotions. These emotions were evoked not only in conversations, but also through the art pieces. Love was perhaps the most expressed emotion.

**Subtheme: Love**

One of the most commonly occurring themes in the visual art pieces was the image of a heart. Hearts represented many things, but often served as a metaphor for community, for activism, and for support. One artist, Makeda, created a heart and put it inside a blue orb, which unintentionally ended up looking like planet Earth (Figure 5.20). She explained that the orb represented “my community and love and coalition and music and conversations and a heart. And now … the good things being shielded or sending out beams into the world and, like, maybe [trying] to change things.” This heart ended up serving as the people of the world, being both attacked and protected by the “hate rays” emitting from the Trump-o’-lantern. Makeda described her art (Figure 5.20) as made up of feelings. When she talked about feelings, she meant emotions but also the physical texture of the art.
Many of the artists created art that was nonlinear and three-dimensional. Makeda (Figure 5.20) used pom-poms, but also strategic rips and tears in the paper, to give the work three-dimensionality. The Trump-o’-lantern was made up of glitter glue and orange paper to add further menace. While Makeda didn’t initially mean for the image of Trump to look like a jack-o-lantern—she chose orange paper because “he’s the Cheeto, yeah, basically … it was orange because of his hair; he’s an orange person”—she created a physical manifestation of how she saw her communities resisting the “hate rays” of the Trump regime.

Figure 5.20 Makeda
D.Prince intentionally created his piece from scraps of other people’s work, and his art also included a heart. However, in his piece, the heart was made of negative space. Makeda had cut a heart shape from a piece of paper. This paper became scrap, which D.Prince repurposed for his own creation. Thus, the heart-shaped hole became a heart again through D.Prince’s creation. D.Prince’s artistic manifestation of a heart represented his own heart and the way it informed his activism. He stated that his heart fits well within the means of the bigger picture. I didn’t center the heart or anything like that. I’m just one being in a sea of others and share these things I have in my heart [that] might be important to me. But my value for relationships and learning from others is what defines the landscape of my activism, and that’s why I took scraps from neighbors and friends—because my actions and activism are purely shaped by those around me. I know my innermost being. Some of the things I want, but I’m driven to be civically engaged based on my friends, the environment that I’ve been in. So, I…also harbor these things, but I don’t flaunt them or poke my chest out, again—or my heart’s not in the middle. But I try to conduct myself in a fashion that lets people know who I am just by how I carry myself and my activism.

D.Prince’s heart guides his activism, and this is illustrated not only in his artwork, but also in how he described his work. His love for others and his interconnectivity with community guide his work. While he noted that others may question why he ends up at a march when they have “never heard [him] talk about it,” he responded that “it’s what’s in
my face right now, and I know it needs to be talked about. So, it’s going to get talked about today.”

D.Prince maintained that he is his own “primary mover and driver,” but that his activism still depends on “who [he] associates with.” Ladybug found beauty in the ways that “two [works of art] speak to each other, because they’re both saying … my identity or my energy here is shaped by my environment, but it’s also central to me in my heart … central to my community, because it’s part of what … you know … is able to deflect and interrupt bigots.” The artists’ interconnectivity here is being elicited by love, not only for others but for themselves as well.

CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 connected with the notion of love in his artwork, too, as he focused one of his art pieces on love. Working collaboratively with Leia, he created an image of a wedding cake framed by the words “love is love,” as seen in Figure 4.19. This representation of love is many-layered, as it was the first instance in this project of artists working collaboratively. This collaboration arose organically. CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 had been frustrated and expressed that he didn’t know how to do art, stating that he wanted “to draw something, but every time I try to take a stab at it … I was going to try cutting the shapes I need to make it out. I’m not good at visual arts.” It was at this point that Leia offered to help create a cake to make his vision a reality. CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 created a piece that reflected his experiences of being queer in an era when new attacks have been launched against LGBT people, and there are still questions regarding the legality of marriage equality; additionally, there was a decision pending at the time of our meetings in the Masterpiece Cakeshop v.
Colorado Civil Rights Commission Supreme Court case. See Appendix H for a similar case from the South that may inform the ruling in Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission. After the initial art sessions were complete the Supreme Court of the United States issued a decision and found the Colorado Civil Rights Commission had failed to consider a religious exemption for Masterpiece Cakeshop.

Masterpiece Cakeshop v. CO CRC was in the forefront of CatsAreBetterThanDogs420’s mind, as he had been recently interviewed by a friend who was writing a paper on LGBT rights for their freshman English class. The other student had asked CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 if he’d be willing to talk with her as a member of the campus queer community, and he obliged. He remarked that he wrote “love is love” because “people are [still] trying to deny LGBT people rights like services or health care or getting a wedding cake, because you are getting married and you want to have a cake at your wedding like everybody else who gets married! I have never been to a wedding, so I guess everyone has a cake … ” This concept of love—a state-sanctioned, public version—is different from the interconnectivity of love expressed by Makeda and D.Prince previously. But it is notable because it is an expression of love that drives some of CatsAreBetterThanDogs420’s activisms.

Cakes played a role in the artistic creation made during our final gathering. The community of artists decided, instead of creating a book—which would have suggested hierarchy and a linear narrative—to bind the pieces together aesthetically rather than narratively. The pieces were pasted onto a larger paper (Figure 5.7) and then connected to
one another. One of the ways that these pieces were connected was by foam cakes, radiating from Claire’s piece to CatsAreBetterThanDogs420’s piece.

**Salient Point: Queer Love**

Claire’s artwork (Figure 5.13) is a three-dimensional flower whose petals open to reveal the words “my activism.” Initially, her piece included only the flower, which is mint-green with a yellow central piece, on a red field. Then Homogoblin asked if Claire was going to write anything on the red field. After Homogoblin asked this question, Claire added the words “life is messy.” When the flower petals open, they represent four important aspects of Claire’s life. Two petals represent music and writing, as she liked “to write and sing. Those are my outlets to maintain emotional sanity.” Another petal is the scales of justice because Claire yearns to be a lawyer and work for “the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] or the Southern Poverty Law Center [SPLC]. [Working for the ACLU or the SPLC] is probably my dream job,” she said. Under the last petal are drawings of people, because she shared that she wants to foster children, especially at-risk children.

The petals are peripheral to another interactive element of her art, labeled “feelings.” This element is seen only when the mint-green petals are opened. A square made of four triangles sits in the middle of the yellow central piece. These triangles lift to reveal another piece of paper glued down, with the words “my activism” inside. Claire stated that while this piece “hides a whole lot,” she hopes “to blossom one day.” Explaining her art, Claire stated that she made “a little hidey thing. I hide a lot, because I have to.” For Claire, hiding is part of self-care. As a queer woman dating another woman,
she has felt at times that she must hide her relationship. When Claire and Homogoblin don’t hide their relationship, there is tension because someone might see them. Both Claire and Homogoblin work for faith-based organizations that condemn same-sex relationships. They live in fear of losing their only sources of income. This employment-based stress has had impacts on their activism and their mental health.

In Chapter 2 I spoke about fear being deployed as a means of control by the government. I think that while Claire and Homogoblin do not cite the state or government, they still expressed apprehension to activism based on fear. Their identities had to be hidden due to a fear of losing employment. Their hiding of their queer sexuality reflects the larger movement that rejects alterity as anti-American, as their act of hiding ties directly into their needs for financial security, and thus adheres them to the logics of capitalism. Their act of partially hiding their sexuality conforms their identity to one that rejects the monster fag (Puar & Rai, 2002), to keep their own safety. Moisi (2009) described fear as an uncertainty of the future. Moreover, he understood that fear was a central emotion to driving action agreeing with Spinoza (1992). The fear of losing employment meant Homogoblin and Claire hid their relationship in public and suppressed and restrained their verbal and non-verbal communication. Without a financial safety net, they shared concerns about the security of their future. This fear and their responses to it also led to social isolation, because their academic world at SCPWI and professional world at a Christian church were very heteronormative.

Claire expressed that she is very lonely due to having to hide a large part of herself. She stated that “it’s lonely to feel like you can’t connect with other people in
your society, because … like, I’m very largely involved in … church stuff, and I don’t
even like [religion].” Claire is “paid to sing for a Catholic church” but is not a member of
the congregation. As a young artist, she shared, it has been hard to find jobs that will pay
her for her art.

Claire did not make connections in her major at SCPWI, either. She was a
criminal justice major who was 24 years old—a nontraditional student. She shared she
had no “connection with any person” in her program, because “a lot of these kids are
straight White conservative people.” Claire’s activism “right now is, like, keeping myself
from … breaking down. That’s my activism. Like, I just actively try to live right now.”
This was very different from her previous experience. Claire had taken two years off
from school, and when she was first in school, she was heavily involved with student
organizations, such as SCPWI’s gay–straight alliance (GSA). Due to the shift in her focus
from social life to academics, she said,

it’s really hard for me, because I used to be the exact opposite. I used to thrive in
social settings, and now I just I feel like I don’t belong. Like … Ruckerville
doesn’t fit. So, it’s very lonely to live like that—to feel like, you know … being
exhausted just living … Like, I hold hands with my partner and walk down [main]
road … I wonder how many of our church people see us and … are going to say
something, or, like, it’s going to get back to my music director, and she’s going to
fire me because of it. You know, because people make stinks like that down here
in the South.
Homogoblin echoed Claire’s feelings of loneliness, stating that working for a Presbyterian-affiliated daycare center was “alienating” in terms of both faith and class, as the school consists of the children of “fairly wealthy” parents. Feelings of loneliness and isolation echoed in both their art pieces. Due to Claire’s focus on academics, and both Claire’s and Homogoblin’s employment for conservative, faith-based organizations, their ability to engage in LGBT activism was inhibited. As queer women living in the South and working for faith-based institutions, they focused their activism on survival. This was a change for Claire, who at one time was a student activist and a visible student leader in SCPWI’s gay–straight alliance. Stepping back was challenging and altered Claire’s identity. Reynolds (2010) illustrated how as activists age and their connection to the activist community alters, so do their relationships. This reflected Claire’s experience; many of her former activist and student leader friends were moving on and away from SCPWI.

**Subtheme: Giving Up and Isolation**

CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 persistently asked his friends to come to events, lectures, rallies, or other events, but they would always respond that they were busy. A theater major involved in the undergraduate activist community, CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 attempted to engage his academic peers in conversations regarding progressive politics and activism, but to no avail. He would try to schedule things around theater rehearsal schedules, and he expressed frustration at always being turned down. He believed that politically
they feel the same way. Or a similar sentiment. But I can’t ever get them to do anything and engage with those feelings. And so, I tried—I’ve given flyers, I’m like, ‘Come to my meetings, come do this, come to this,’ and it just never works. So, it’s just like, at what point do I just stop trying to engage them?

Claire also expressed frustration at being unable to connect with her academic peers. As a criminal justice major, she expressed shock that some of her peers weren’t as passionate as she was about hate crimes and providing protections. She went on to explain that “everybody, at least in my classes, really wants to be super tentative with the subject and be super politically correct and not say anything too, I guess, too controversial.” She was disconcerted that most of her peers “actually agreed with the Supreme Court” and its rulings on hate speech laws. She expressed that this illustrated that “the fundamental conservative mindset is still very much alive, even in young people.” This prevented her from forming relationships, which added to her isolation.

I connect the isolation and fear as experienced by Homogoblin and Claire to the work of Spinoza (1994) and Ahmed (2014). Where the two primary affects focused on by Spinoza were hope and fear, as I expressed above, for Homogoblin and Claire the dominant emotion expressed during our times together were those related to fear. Fear does not bring people together (Ahmed, 2014). Due to the fear of losing their employment, Homogoblin and Claire were unable to find community in their academic or professional life. Ahmed (2014) argued that without hope, activism is hard to maintain, as hope enables us to believe that change is possible. Homogoblin and Claire shared that
they had been unable to as engaged in activism as they would like due to the fear they experienced.

**Subtheme: Empathy**

Empathy played a large role in the artists’ activisms as well. This was expressed quite poignantly by Leia when she described her art. Leia is from New Jersey and grew up going to punk rock shows. One of her pieces (Figure 5.21) is words on red paper, pasted on a black field reading “I Don’t Know How To Explain To You That You Should Care About Other People.” The first letters of each word were capitalized, as if she were yelling, but this also denoted the way this sentiment has become a meme on social media. Leia explained that there was this

whole thing on Twitter about the fact that, like, there’s a certain … way of texting … millennials are really good at, because the fact that … there has been, like, a development of … tones of voices and, like, sarcasm and … importance based on … certain, like, capitalization … and italics and stuff that … none of us have ever been taught to do but just inherently do on the internet. And it’s become, like, its own sublanguage of the internet in the way that … everyone knows what those things mean—that you read it differently in your head—but no one has ever been like, ‘If you capitalize the first letter of each of these things, it looks like a title and therefore signifies importance.’
The phrase Leia used is used to mock political decisions. For instance, one example she gave was the proposal of “tripling rents for people” who receive housing subsidies (Jan, Dewey, & Stein, 2018). For Leia, showing basic empathy for individuals should not be difficult to do, which is what she attempted to convey in her piece, mocking those who do not show empathy. On the other side of the same work (Figure 5.22), Leia used lyrics from a song titled “Cynicism” by the band Nana Grizol (Nana Grizol, 2010). The excerpt she used reads, “Cynicism isn’t wisdom, it’s a lazy way to say that you’ve been burned. It seems if anything, you’d be less certain after everything you ever learned” (Nana Grizol, 2010). Behind these lyrics, written in pencil on the black field, barely legible were the words “give a shit” written over and over to cover the entire page.
This entire piece reflects the notion of empathy. Leia remarked that many people who got involved in the New Jersey punk scene (a scene she grew up in, and that I am intimately familiar with) did so because they thought that for punks, the cool thing is to not care. But Leia said she thinks they are trying to be “cool and edgy by not giving a shit. And, like, I have tried very hard and in … all of my activism and my … day-to-day life, to be like, ‘Hey, it’s, like, really cool to give a shit. It’s really punk to give a shit.’” Many of her punk peers have expressed that the “entirety of the reason they were supposed to be punk is that you don’t give a shit. I’m like, no. Like, caring about stuff is cool. Let’s do it.” Leia complicated what being punk means, inverting the sometimes-nihilistic thinking of punk communities and reframing punk as a space for liberation. This is reflective of my own foray into punk rock. Some of the first punk music I ever purchased was the Rock Against Bush (Rock Against Bush, Vol. 1, 2004) CDs, which
were designed to engage fans of punk rock to register to vote in order to oppose then-President George W. Bush.

Love and empathy play a large role in the activism of these artists. D.Prince, Leia, and Ladybug expressed frustration that some people didn’t seem to care about others as much as these artists thought they should. This was a driver of activism, perhaps most eloquently stated by Leia in her art when she said, “I Don’t Know How To Explain To You That You Should Care About Other People,” and in her ethic that it’s “really punk to give a shit.” This resonated deeply with me. My personal journey to activism came through punk music, and it was exciting to hear from someone else who ascribed to a punk ethos of giving a shit. Also, because zines have a long history in punk rock (B. L.-A. Bell, 2002; Duncombe, 2008), Leia’s ethic layered that historic connection.

Moreover, empathy for others served to guide much of their activism. As D.Prince expressed, his activism was guided by the actions and experiences of those around him. For Crossa (2013), empathy is a guiding force. Like the street vendors and artisans that Crossa (2013) described, for D.Prince and many of the artists, empathy helped to bind their activism together with other activists in their community.

*Disbelief.*

For some of these artists, a lack of empathy in others was quite scary. In talking about empathy, Leia used the example that male politicians with daughters were more likely to support legal abortion, because “they have this sudden realization that, like, people who are not me exist” and that “my daughter deserves rights. And so, like, that changes people’s perspectives … I don’t know … it’s very exhausting.” Regarding the
conversation Ladybug had with his stepfather and used as an opportunity to turn the snowflake pejorative, generally levied against so-called social justice warriors, Ladybug expressed frustration with people’s lack of empathy. He and D.Prince had a conversation in which D.Prince expressed frustration that people have to be “forced to do it [confront privilege].” Many of the artists had been astonished to discover, in past conversations with others, that the other person did not care about people and about justice.

For some of these artists, this drove their activism. Leia expressed frustration, because she felt should not have to tell someone that they need to care about other people. They should have thought about their own privilege “a little bit harder at some point at any time before now,” she shared. “I shouldn’t have even had to bring this up, but you should care about other people … it’s creepy. It freaks me out to have that conversation with people, but I have that conversation with people a lot.”

Ladybug expressed that “it’s, like, scary” that others have not “thought about this [privilege and oppression].” For these artists, empathy for others and their communities was so fundamental that a lack of empathy was both scary and confusing. It was hard for the artists to understand how others in their orbits could express so little concern for people and their worlds.

It should be noted, however, that while this was of concern to these artists, they seemed to believe “that one can change a narrative by merely offering another, better one” and that an individual’s “empathy will quickly and reliably take over” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 28). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) argued that empathy is in fact a rare trait, and that due to ideological and racial silos, people rarely interact with different
perspectives. This siloing shapes our perception of the world. In the case of these artists, their world was shaped by their empathy, which in turn was challenged by others who did not express a similar sentiment.

**Theme 6: Mental Health, Self-Care, and Guilt**

The notion of taking care of oneself was elicited with significance several times. For some artists, self-care exhibited as a trigger for guilt. Claire, in particular, spoke about her struggle with mental health and how this has impacted her activism. In describing her artwork (Figure 5.13), she said that she has

> to hide my activism right now because I have a lot of things to still work on myself. I used to take a lot of antidepressants and anti-anxiety meds, and I’m off them all right now completely because health care is shitty and I can’t afford to see my psychiatrist to do a medication management again.

Claire placed self-care as peripheral to finishing her degree. As someone who had taken time off from school, coming back and graduating was very important to her. With only weeks left to go at the time of the creation of this art, graduation and what came next were very present in our conversations. She was waiting until graduation to get a full-time “job, [so] then I can work on myself.” But she also felt that waiting to take care of herself “was kind of a wrong decision, because I think I probably should have devoted more time to helping me.” Her coming graduation “just exacerbated” her anxiety. She expressed how she would get so
anxious about, like, the simplest things, like I have to let the dog out. Oh! And I need to get the mail. Oh! I need to clean the car! And it just ... snowballs to the point where I'm like, I can't do any of it.

With graduation just “three weeks away,” she was facing leaving and having to deal with a lot of things she had been putting off:

I don’t want to do that. Like ... I’m afraid of doing that. So, I guess my activism going forward would be fixing all of that, so I can actually be the person for other people that I want to be, and I don’t have to think about myself all the time. It makes you feel shitty and guilty, and I can’t think of other people because I’m just so tired. So, it sucks. Sorry, guys.

Claire’s guilt resonated with Leia, who remarked on the “exhaustion and the guilt that comes with having to put yourself first in situations when you want to put your life [toward] fixing other things.” Guilt was an effect of the need for self-care. Feelings of guilt arose for Claire and Leia because they wanted to do more—be able to do more. They felt guilty for not being enough of an activist. Claire had to hide a lot of herself to maintain her only source of income. Further, she had to take care of her anxiety and depression after she “lost [her] health insurance,” which prevented her from maintaining her medication routine. Leia expressed deep support for Claire, stating that “you are great, and it [self-care] is a hard thing to do.” Further, Leia emphasized that “self-care is not taking bubble baths.” Self-care “is, like, actively removing yourself from situations that are too overwhelming for you … to actually be of assistance” to others.
Ladybug talked about how the guilt some may experience might motivate them to get involved in activism, but how he realized that when you “approach activism from a place of guilt, then you’re just seeking … validation or, like, acceptance from the community [you’re] trying to stand with” rather than actual change. This echoed the work of Audre Lorde (1984), who illustrated that guilt can halt productivity and is of no use in the pursuit of justice. I think this is important to think about for this study—to understand how guilt may play a role in initial engagement in activism but that it cannot be a sustaining force behind activism. Ladybug believed that guilt was what was “first expressed when I was, like, learning” about history and oppression. He believed that this guilt meant those expressing it were seeking validation, rather than attempting to undo the legacy of oppression. Leaning on the work of Lorde (1984), we can recognize that guilt has the power to inhibit movement. Moreover, Lorde (1984) argued that we must move from guilt into anger, and channel this anger to challenge the oppression it is directed toward.

I connected these conversations to the work of Rodgers (2010) who found that emotions were not enough to sustain activism work. While activism is driven by emotions, emotions alone are not enough to sustain the work. As illustrated by some of these artists, emotions such as guilt may guide individuals to activism, but one might undertake activist work for selfish reasons, too. Further, the artists spoke about self-care being something that was important, that activists need to be able to take care of themselves before they take care of others, or they face a very real reality of burn-out, something that Rodgers (2010) found was present with the employees at the organization that he studied.
Leia’s art (Figure 5.21) spoke about empathy and caring about one another. Moreover, Mark (Figure 5.9) also touched on this in his work. While caring about one another was present in many of the zines, Angel_Rainbow_Daisy (Figure 5.23) was the only one who deliberately spoke to a notion of self-care in her art. She expressed that activists need to “LOVE YOURSELF. LISTEN TO YOURSELF. FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHTS”. While the words self-care were not embedded into this quote, I believe that evident in her statements is a call for self-care.

**Salient Point: “Reactive Existence” to Oppression**

Leia talked abstractly about how, for her, activism largely centered on existing in a world in which members of “marginalized communities” are forced to “choose [our] battles.” Her activism involved “focusing [her] energy on specific things,” like “just existing in addition to being able to do what I care about,” so she would feel that “at least you’ve accomplished something.” The ongoing pressure of living in a space in which they are always othered and subject to heteronormative hegemonies made Leia and some other activists focus on a “day-to-day reactive existence.” This notion of a reactive existence was, for Leia,

the process of existing in a way that is, like, inherently controversial or …inherently an issue (*Claire agrees*) in, like, your society. So, when you do anything, you feel like there is pushback of some sort or…like you’re dragging
your feet, because there’s something pulling you back because of the ways you interact with the world… That. Yeah. So, I think that’s more tiring (Claire agrees)… than for other people. If you walk through the world with the assumption that everything is fine or that you are [fine], or if, like, you have enough privilege, you never feel the pullback of something else—then… you can’t estimate how exhausted other people are. You’re just existing.

This reactive existence as activism was echoed by Homogoblin, who shared that her engagement with activism right now was “just sort of being myself around people that I don’t know, people that I do know. That’s kind of my level of activism right now.”

These artists who are members of communities under attack in a contemporary political climate see just existing as a form of resistance. This notion of reactive existence was also indirectly called on in Mark’s artwork. In this piece he stated, “I’M HERE AND I STAND WITH & FOR THOSE WHO CAN’T BE HERE. JUST AS I STAND WITH THOSE BESIDE ME. I FIGHT FOR YOU EVEN IF YOU CAN’T FIGHT FOR YOURSELF.” His statement could be interpreted as a statement of support for those who survive in “reactive existence”. He shared his commitment to working in solidarity with those who are unable to fight.

Conversations about mental health, guilt, and self-care occurred with regularity among activist groups (Newsome, 2017), and I believe along with Singh and Burnes (2010) that self-care is central to a “resistance strategy to patriarchal frameworks” (p. 136). Despite Claire’s and Leia’s awareness of the importance of self-care, they noted only the barriers to its practice.
Subtheme: Self-Care and Resistance

Self-care was also illustrated in some of the art, for instance in the piece by Angel_Rainbow_Daisy (Figure 5.23) with the words “Love yourself. Listen to urself. Fight for your rights.” Angel_Rainbow_Daisy’s work was layered and double-sided. On one side, she listed what she wanted. She stated that “we want love, happiness, friendship, peace, respect, love + happiness” and that “we deal w/ sadness, oppression, obstacles, stigmas, stereotypes, hatred + sadness.” Further, “we have multiple intersects of our identities {I’m Latina, I’m a feminist, I’m the daughter of immigrants, I’m cis, I’m white passing, I have privlege [sic]}” She also encouraged people to “teach others. Serve others. Love others. Listen to them. Fight for them. Stand with them. Learn from them.” Her work reflected that “you we have the power to change the world <3.” She also expressed that “we are all the same in very different ways” and that “there is probably something that you can do right now about it [oppression].” This text-heavy piece reflects the activisms that Angel_Rainbow_Daisy engaged in at SCPWI.
Angel_Rainbow_Daisy was a prominent student leader on campus, and many of the young adult activists I knew during my time on campus looked to her as a mentor, someone to learn from, and someone to fight alongside. Angel_Rainbow_Daisy described her work as “collective messiness,” to which Makeda and D.Prince almost simultaneously replied, “just like life.” Representations of messiness ran through many of the artists’ works, making an appearance in Claire’s second piece (Figure 5.13).

The piece (Figure 5.24) called for us to balance our lives. Claire focused on the brain, social media, and mental health. Her piece physically divided the brain from social media. Patterned paper of many colors was made into what resembled puzzle pieces, filled with references to mental health concerns such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression. Written in the puzzle pieces were phrases Claire heard over the years that affected her mental health. The puzzle pieces ran vertically down the page separating the paper almost
in half. Claire drew lines from the puzzle pieces to names of social media platforms such as Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Tumblr that she had written on the right side of her piece of art. She represented phrases she had heard about her sexuality and her upcoming wedding to Homogoblin: *We won’t come to your wedding. I won’t call her your partner. Homosexuality is a sin. I can’t be friends with you if you’re going to be gay.* Claire addressed her mental health through puzzle pieces, too, with phrases such as *You’re [sic] MI (mental illness) is too much to deal with. I don’t want to be friends and You’re a whore. You can’t be a leader, because you attempted suicide. It’s your fault.*

From the two pieces that Claire produced (Figures 5.13 and 5.24), I saw that mental health played a large role in the ways she articulated her activism. This was clear through her piece that physically hid the words “my activism” under her “feelings” and the petals of her flower. She also illustrated the centrality of mental health by physically separating a brain from references to social media and PTSD, anxiety, depression, and various hurtful statements.

Further, familial connections or lack thereof played a role in Claire’s mental health. She questioned, “How much of your time do you spend, you know, trying to convince someone of something versus … doing other things? Like, I struggle with how much time should I really spend trying to reconnect with my mother.” Claire’s mother is a social worker, and this professional identity has helped create a divide between the two of them. Claire said that being anxious or depressed is hard to explain to family; her mother, for instance, “thinks she knows me, but she doesn’t—like, she does not know who I actually am.”
And due to her mother’s overwhelming desire to help and her professional training, instead of listening to Claire, she attempts to diagnose her. Claire explained that when she attempts to “tell her why I’m anxious or I’m depressed—you know, she’s a social worker, so she’ll say, ‘When you’re anxious and depressed because blah blah,’ and I’m like, that’s not helpful, because I don’t think that’s the reason.” Due to this, Claire does not “even talk to her about real things, because it’s not even worth the bother.” This piece reflects Claire’s loneliness, but also family strain, something that she was not alone in experiencing.

**Theme 7: The South**

**Subtheme: From the South**
The contexts of where these artists grew up had an impact on how they experienced their activisms. Most of them grew up in the South, and southern contexts influenced all of them and their activist work. We all lived, worked, and engaged in art and activism in a southern context. Leia was the only outlier in the group; she was from New Jersey. That geopolitical space shaped how she saw her work, too. Many of the artists spoke about being from the South. For this reason, I inquired about whether they felt “the South played a role in [their] activism.” The artists resoundingly affirmed that it did. Claire replied that it “very much so” informed her work. CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 felt that if he had not been raised in the South, if his family had been from the North, that how he would “view the world” would “be different.” Issues specific to South Carolina informed his activism, and if he had been born anywhere else, his “activism would be different,” he thought. “I might not, [hesitation] like, [hesitation]—because there are … issues that are … South Carolina-specific, like Henry McMaster, the fucking governor, [I] wouldn’t feel so passionate about it if I was … not from here.” He further argued that if he had been “born somewhere else and ended up at [SCPWI], I could care about what was going on [here], but it wouldn’t inform my experiences, because I was born in Massachusetts or something.” For these reasons, CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 contended that “being in the South, and [in] South Carolina, informs my work, because it shaped who I was growing up, and how I’m gonna view the world.”

Homogoblin agreed. She was not from South Carolina but from a small town in southwest Virginia, and she stated that it is not just a “South Carolina thing.” “Being from the South in general” informed the artists’ activism. Specifically, Homogoblin commented on the small size of the town she grew up in and highlighted that it had
“seriously, maybe four stoplights, and [I/you] could probably drive all the way across town in five minutes.” The size of the community you grow up in “definitely changes, shapes who you are ultimately,” Homogoblin shared. “It’s a different feel.”

Claire added that she didn’t think she “would have done so well if I’d grown up in a small town.” For Homogoblin, the town where SCPWI is located, Ruckerville, is—at about 100,000 people—“the biggest city [she’s] ever lived in.” Similarly, Ruckerville was the biggest city CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 had ever lived in, and he said he lived for a time “in a super-small rural town that everyone hates.” The artists spoke abstractly and philosophically about this topic. None of them offered much specificity about the differences between Ruckerville and more rural areas. The group may have been relying on assumptions about rural areas that they assumed everyone in the room held. I believe that through an assumption about the shared experience of Ruckerville, South Carolina, and SCPWI, members of the group used in-group communication to share their thoughts and feelings with one another.

I think about my first experience of coming to SCPWI, after living and working in the suburbs of Chicago. I was shocked at the small size of the city compared with Chicago, and I remember being equally shocked when the students with whom I worked shared that they had come to SCPWI to go to college in “the big city.” But after I graduated with my master’s degree and lived and worked in the woods for a year, I came back and was blown away by how big the city was. Experiences are relative, and they shape how we see the world. I keep this in mind as I think about how the city where
SCPWI is located looked to me at two very different times in my life. It is important to recognize the many ways in which individuals view the city.

Homogoblin spoke about her experience of being from a small town in western Virginia as being a coded way that referenced to tacit assumptions about small towns: that they are close-minded and conservative. These assumptions may not always be true, but it seemed that this reality, or assumed reality, shaped how Homogoblin saw the world. The assumptions informed Claire’s thinking as well; she believed that she would not “have done so well if I’d grown up in a small town.” It seemed that for some of these artists, Ruckerville represented the big city—an inversion of the rural majority of the state, where *rural* represents a racist southern culture.

**Racist southern culture.**

Many of the artists expressed that they came from backgrounds that were conservative, compared with their own political positions and activisms. The tensions they described resonated with me as I recalled my own family background. I remember, with not a little pain, the arguments and fights over social justice and politics I took part in with members of my family growing up. Homogoblin believed that the “South is glorified above all else for some reason” and that the glorification was “a weird cultural thing.” The glorification of the South and southern culture also bothered Ladybug quite a bit. He recounted how frustrating the assimilation of southern culture can be. He stated that one of the most

visceral, like, expressions of it [southern culture] is … all the … out-of-state students—like, the Yankees—that come down here, and they wear boat shoes and
Chubbies\textsuperscript{40} and Southern Tide,\textsuperscript{41} and they very much … want to assimilate into the southern good old boy culture, and, like, it’s ‘Uhhh?!’ So anyone who would be like, “Oh no, yeah, you don’t have a fashy [slang for fascist] White supremacist culture down here.” \textit{[sarcastically]} It’s like, “Well, do you see \textit{everyone}?” People who aren’t even from here who want to buy into, like, the frat—you know, Old Row\textsuperscript{42} type … bow-tie-type stuff, like … “This is the best.” \textit{[satirically]} \textit{[It’s]}, like, one of the main draws of SCPWI.

This quote is interesting and many-layered for me. On its surface, it is very much a critique of the glorification of southern culture, made real through capitalistic consumption of a southern formation of style. Beyond being coded as “southern”, this style is also coded as “White, male, and upper-middle class”. This was due to the cost associated with these brands and also the fact that the individuals wearing these brands were often members of historically White fraternities. Moreover, this reflects an idea of Whiteness as property (Harris, 1993). Cheryl Harris (1993) explained the ways in which White Americans have amassed wealth through the years through the historical subjugation of Native American and African Americans. More than just the monetary wealth afforded to White populations from this history, Whiteness itself can be construed as the greatest property afforded to White people as “whiteness [is] also central to national identity… the amalgamation of various European strains into an American

\textsuperscript{40} A popular brand of shorts for male-bodied individuals, according to Ladybug often worn by members of historically White fraternities.
\textsuperscript{41} An apparel company located in Greenville, South Carolina, and founded by a graduate of SCPWI; a brand often worn by members of historically White fraternities and sororities.
\textsuperscript{42} A lifestyle brand that glorifies an image of conservative frat culture.
identity [that] was facilitated by an oppositional definition of black as Other” (C. I. Harris, 1993, p. 1742). Thus, the affirmation of Whiteness as a form of property, and thus wealth, is reflected in the reification of white solidarity as espoused in the actions undertaken by the Trump administration. Ladybug tied notions of Whiteness to a formation of capitalist consumption. This consumption was displayed through the purchasing of products to create a formation of a White southern masculinity. Purchasing this identity is an illustration of how wealth can create solidarity between members of an in-group, such as White men, and in particular White men participating in Greek letter organizations and performing southern and affluent White, male culture.

The critique by Ladybug of this performance of White masculinity resists an institutionalized White patriarchy manifested through a particular fashion style. At SCPWI this style was often coded as particular to men in Greek letter organizations, and Ladybug was coding it as “southern”, paying close attention to the way men from the North came to SCPWI and attempted to perform southernness by adopting this style. Moreover, Ladybug, in his collaborative piece with Mothman (Figure 5.10) called for resistance to southern culture and the breeding of “REAL REBELS”. ABR is generative in subverting normative thinking and challenging oppressive ideologies (Leavy, 2017) and the resistance manifested by Mothman and Ladybug to a particular formation of southernness is an example of resistance in ABR.

While White patriarchy is relevant in a northern context, as highlighted by Leia, Ladybug was interested in how northern men came to the South and literally bought into a certain formation of southern, affluent, White masculinity that Ladybug called “fashy”.

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This statement by Ladybug also reflects retrenchment in a cultural divide between the North and the South. In his critique as a southerner, he others students from the North, deploying the pejorative “Yankee” against them as out-of-state northern students. In doing so he clearly affirmed where he was from, and how he potentially viewed out-of-state northern students.

D.Prince, a recent graduate of SCPWI, who was job searching around the country, remarked that the southern context played a large role for him. For many of the artists, the Confederate flag came up, as seen in Figure 4.13. D.Prince remarked that he felt the flag was most important in the southern context. While the flag did not play a role in his job search, he did share that he believed he was “probably not going to be talking about the Confederate flag as much if I’m living in New York for the next decade. Maybe. [hesitates] Probably. [laughs] Obviously, there is still need for all conversations in any space, but [trails off].” This reflection by D.Prince signifies that he had begun to rethink, in the moment, that the idea that the flag only needs to be dealt with in South Carolina.

The Confederate flag loomed large in the mind of Mothman, who grew up in its shadow and “watch[ed] that flag being taken down” from where it had flown in front of the statehouse in South Carolina. This was accomplished through activism in the wake of the June 2015 shooting by a young, White male of nine African American parishioners in the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in downtown Charleston. This event occurred while many of these artists were in college or were coming into their identities as young adult activists. In South Carolina, it is rare to go a day without seeing the
Confederate flag either flying or on the back of vehicles. It is an ever-present reminder of
the White supremacist effect on the state.

The history of the widespread institution of slavery, White supremacy, White
terrorism, and White racism in the South intersected with familial connections as well,
particularly for CatsAreBetterThanDogs420. He spoke about challenging his father’s
bigotry, and how those challenges were related to the family’s location in the South.
CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 grew up in South Carolina in a small town. He stated that
“it’s very easy, like, when you’re in a situation—whether you … just [grew] up in the
South or [live] here. It’s easy to, like, get caught up just [in] what’s going on specifically
around you,” as there is “a lot of bad stuff going on around you, even if it doesn’t directly
affect you. You know how that still in some ways does affect you.”

He was bothered as a small child by racism he noticed around him. After
CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 moved to Rockville, he questioned his parents about why
“they all never went to church” since moving. He had to ask several times, and finally,
his parents told him that “all the churches here are Black churches.”
CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 was astonished. He responded to his parents: “You’re
choosing racism over God?! … I was, like, 8 years old, and I couldn’t, like, compute that.
Like, they were choosing racism over God.”

As he grew older, he would continue to have arguments about race with his father,
who grew up in South Carolina. One big argument stood out to
CatsAreBetterThanDogs420, and he shared it with us as follows.
I know one of my dad’s biggest arguments when I was growing up, when I’d be like, “People in the South are racist, Dad!”—he’d be like, “People in the North are racist!” And I’d be like, “Yeah, but they’re also very racist in the South and more likely to be racist in the South.” And he would always get mad at me, because he’d say, “You can’t just say it’s only the South.” And I was never trying to. And my dad would always—[hesitates]—instead of being like, “Yes, and it’s a problem; here’s how we can fix it,” my dad would always, like, default to just arguing with me about … the fact that there are people who are racist who live in New York … [hesitates] Like, “There are racists that live everywhere!” But my dad’s big thing would be like, “Well, in New York, blah blah blah.” And I’d be like, “Dad, you haven’t even been to New York.” [all laugh]

While there is no doubt that racism is prevalent in the South, it manifested itself in many contexts and spaces. CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 deployed a logic of argumentation that, while true, distanced himself from complicity with the racism of the South. He attempted to shift the blame for racism away from himself, and the culture he grew up in, rather than taking ownership of U.S. culture that is rooted in White supremacy and racism. In my own experience, I witnessed White supremacist actions in my home state of New Jersey, as well as in various other spaces where I have lived or visited. For CatsAreBetterThanDogs420, who has never lived outside South Carolina, his worldview of oppression is built around his experience, and thus, he critiques that context—whereas his father, despite being raised in and living in a similar context, defended it.
These various resistances to what the artists saw as a southern formation of oppression reflect ABR’s potential as ABR often serves to challenge and confront stereotypes that serve to continually disenfranchise groups (Leavy, 207). For some artists, conservative ideologies were an expression of being from the South (which I addressed in connection to Distance in Families of Birth). However, Leia, the sole northerner in the group (apart from me), was quick to point out that oppressive conservative ideologies and politics existed up North as well. This echoed my own upbringing. I fought with family members from western Pennsylvania (not the South). Just as these artists expressed how relationships played a role in their own activisms, emotions played a large role in the sustaining and driving forces of activism.

In the artists expressions of speaking about the South, many emotions were present. Anger, disbelief, and disappointment were shared and echoed by many of the artists. As such, these emotions informed my analysis of this iteration of my work. I found them to inform my work but did not analyze them as themes or subthemes.

Conversations about what the South is were interesting to witness, particularly given my positionality as both insider and outsider to the region. The South made its way into several art pieces, such as the visual poem by Mothman and Ladybug (Figure 5.10) and appeared in the use of kudzu in the collaborative piece (Figure 5.7). My positionality plays a role in this as well, as I remember multiple times when I have been called a “Yankee” or been asked to speak on behalf of all northerners. Leia expressed confusion about people in the South coupling her identity to geography. She recounted that prior to coming to SCPWI, she never thought of herself as from the North, or even had a concept
of “the North.” This distinction of regionalism was echoed by Homogoblin, who came from southwest Virginia. She argued that she would say someone from “NoVa” (Northern Virginia) is from the North, but not someone from any other part of the state.

Leia agreed that someone from NoVa wouldn’t be considered southern, but she wouldn’t call them “northern”. For her, the distinction was “[defining] what is and is not the South.” She remarked that others from the North who have not lived in the South cast the region as monolithic. She recounted talking with a friend from the North who remarked that they did not like the South after visiting Texas. Leia responded by stating that, “Texas is its own country, to begin with—also, like, Texas is as far from South Carolina as New Jersey is”. Not liking the South based on Texas was ridiculous, because “things are not defined based on [hesitates] like where they are. For me, it is very much defined whether they are or are not [culturally] the South.” Homogoblin agreed with this assessment of the location of the South. She said that she felt that this was “probably pretty accurate for a lot of people from the South as well.”

*Salient point: southern rejection — rejecting a southern identity.*

Some of the artists’ rejection of being southern reflected the culture that is defined as the South. Ladybug argued that northerners assimilate into a “fashy” White supremacist culture that he coded as “southern”. Homogoblin both acknowledged shame as a southerner and recognized bias against southerners. She expressed that she has a sort of “dreamlike view of the West Coast and, like, the North and how everything is wonderful there and everything sucks here.” I probed, asking if this was reflective of the children’s tale “Three Billy Goats Gruff,” and she and the others laughed. Homogoblin
replied, “The grass is always greener—exactly, yeah.” Claire stated that “in a lot of ways, it is, so [trails off].”

When these artists reflected on the things they liked about being southern, they were all related to the natural environment. Ladybug acknowledged that he does “love this state, but usually when I’m thinking about it, I’m thinking about the kudzu or the mountains, not the people—that natural beauty of it, not the ideology.” For these artists, there has been a real attempt to disconnect from the South, even when the context of the South has played a central role in how they see the world. This is evident in the distancing of southern culture by Ladybug, joined with his deployment of the term Yankee in his previous critique of men from the North coming to the South and performing southern fashion.

The notion of the grass being greener connects in an interesting way with the natural beauty Ladybug thought about when he took time to admire and appreciate the state he was from. The natural beauty of greenery, specifically kudzu, played an important and symbolic role in the collaborative art. This symbolism showed some of the artists’ affinity for the natural beauty of the South, even when there was tension with the South.

The national narrative against the South as being more racist and backward than other parts of the country also informs this context (Zolfagharifard, 2015). As someone who has lived outside the South, I recognize that many of these artists’ statements are limited by their context of having lived only in the South. In our time together, I did not want to impose my beliefs about how other regions have just as much racism.
CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 attempted to add this into the conversation, and Homogoblin acknowledged that her vision of the West was somewhat dreamlike. And Leia was able to add, from the context of being from New Jersey, that the North also has racism. Despite these acknowledgements, this was reflective that other regions are not seen in the same ways that the South is often cast, as backward and racist.

**Salient Point: From the North**

Leia remarked that she felt being from New Jersey is “interesting, in the ways that New Jersey is and is not diverse compared to the South.” For instance, she stated that she was from a “very White town” but would go to “Patterson [a densely populated, diverse city in New Jersey] every weekend with [her] mother to go get Lebanese food, and that kind of exposure is very different” than what she might have had if she had lived “down south.” It is important to note that she illustrated that even in the northern context of New Jersey, she too experienced racial segregation, as she was from a “very White town.”

Leia chose a southern school intentionally. She saw her commitment to activism and social justice as contrasting with the priorities of her friends, who mostly attended liberal arts schools in the Northeast. If she had attended one of those schools, such as “SUNY New Paltz,” she would be among “a hundred people who look and act exactly like me.” She further expounded on this idea, stating that she had a friend “who moved from Hawaii to New York to be a photographer, and I was like, ‘What are you doing?’ And she was like, ‘Everyone’s a photographer in Hawaii.’” Leia used this metaphor to situate herself as being unique as an activist in the South, stating that she felt she had
the ability to actually, like, make concrete difference in a place that is … actively … causing it [oppression] … Yeah. It’s, like, a very different environment. It’s like, “Wow, I want to go to this place for various reasons, but I’m willing to deal with all the shit because I would rather actually make an impact and be able to do things in life that mattered, more than just, like, the default.” … I feel like my friends who go to liberal arts schools in the Northeast … have, like, no consciousness of the ways that … the United States is still very oppressive to different groups. And, like, while they … probably interact with different things in different ways, it’s just a very different relationship, because a lot of them really moved away from activism because of the fact that they felt like they were unnecessary. Or … they were like, “Yeah, well, you know … everyone at my school, like, has fairly similar [experiences].”

The notion of carpetbaggers—people from the North who traveled south after the Civil War to take economic advantage of the South—also arose during the artists’ conversations. Homogoblin identified Leia as a carpetbagger, stating that “we need people like you” to help make the South “more inclusive.” Today, the term carpetbagger is often used pejoratively to describe politicians running for political office in an area they are not from (Collins English Dictionaries, 2014), but this was not the way Homogoblin used the term. I believe Homogoblin’s use reflects the work of Thompson (2003), who argued that White people often perform the role of “good white,” just as I and other northerners perform a role of “helping.” Some carpetbaggers may have hidden behind a façade of helping while they exploited the South’s economic and racial
divisions. This possibility was also echoed by Ladybug in his description of people who get engaged in activism to assuage White guilt rather than to fight racism or oppression.

Leia acknowledged that the North is not any better in regard to oppression, particularly racism. Being the only person from the North in this project, she was the only one who acknowledged that oppression existed in the North. She recounted a story about her close friend “Suzie,” who was the only Black girl in their high school. Suzie expressed frustration at being a queer Black woman in a space that had “a lack of diversity,” “combined with the ways that … we think that New Jersey is, like, a very inclusive, open place.” The conception of oppression being an institution particular to the South is important to think through for the purposes of this project, because though most of these artists were from the South, two of us—I and Leia—were from the North. Leia was quick to illustrate how the North also has its own issues when it came to oppression, and in his own way, the father of CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 illustrated this to his son as well.

As expressed by all the artists, the context of South Carolina—and, more broadly, the South—played a huge role in understanding the articulations of these artists and the ways in which they engaged in activism. This context was expressed in topics such as the Confederate flag, as addressed by D.Prince, or through artists’ worldviews, as we saw from CatsAreBetterThanDogs420, but it was also expressed in the way southerners such as Homogoblin and Claire perpetuated deficit views of the South.

**Subtheme: SCPWI**
While not all the artists were current SCPWI students, those who were not were former students of the university. Therefore, unsurprisingly, SCPWI itself arose as a site to interrogate and to use to understand the artists’ activisms. One piece of art stood out as specifically directed at SCPWI. This piece, by Leia (Figure 5.16), is an image of a black graduation cap on a red field. The words on the cap seem as if they are swirling down, and they read as follows:

Welcome to the University! Please enjoy your stay. Use your time here and engage with your peers in a meaningful way. Get involved, but only in the activities that maintain our current idea of a proper South Carolina values. Do get involved but don’t speak out. Do speak up, but don’t challenge oppressive behavior in professors and curriculum. Do involve in SA (sexual assault) awareness, but don’t make people uncomfortable. Do enough to put on a resume, but never so much you disrupt the power structure.

Leia provided a deep critique of the way that SCPWI engaged with neoliberal rhetoric of inclusion with her art. Starting with the phrase Welcome to the University!, Ahmed (2012) argued that those who need welcoming to a space, are not those who truly belong in that space, nor does that space belong to them. Further, the notion of enjoy[ing] your stay, I argue, further supports the lacking of belonging, as it sounds as if one is staying at a hotel, therefore, the stay is temporary, whereas the institution, and perceivably its values will remain long after the person who is being welcomed has left. Leia wrote out don’t make people uncomfortable, something she argued is central to her work as an activist. I think this is important, as it shows that she herself did not feel welcomed into
this space due, in part, to her activism. This is further supported by the *do enough to put on a resume, but never so much you disrupt power structure*. This sentiment both acknowledged the structures of power, but Leia understood that the institution did not want student upsetting the status quo.

Mothman also had some deep critiques of SCPWI’s history related to issues of inclusion. According to Mothman, several years ago incoming students created a GroupMe\(^{43}\) chat for the incoming class of 2020, and despite not being part of that class, Mothman was put in the group chat, because Mothman’s friend knew that Mothman would want to challenge the racial slurs used in the group. Mothman was astonished that there were a lot of people sharing racially offensive memes and using racial slurs. Mothman was so bothered by this that they reported the incident to the chief diversity officer at SCPWI. The incident happened in the summer of 2016 when I worked on campus in the multicultural center, and I distinctly remember it. Several in-coming students, whom were read as white, were sharing memes that were racially offensive, targeting both African American and Latinx populations.

Makeda, who had transferred to SCPWI after this incident, was upset to hear that this had happened, but not surprised. The incident had been Mothman’s first experience with SCPWI, and at that time they had no desire or plans to come to school here. When Mothman eventually ended up at SCPWI, they felt anxious about coming to campus already having a reputation because of the incident. The emotions of anxiety and fear

\(^{43}\) A group messaging application popular with the student body at SCPWI.
seemed to drive Mothman to find community once they arrived on campus. They hoped to find others who were willing to share emotions and who had similar commitments with whom they could work and find community (Goodwin et al., 2001).

Mothman expressed that they didn’t know how this incident was handled after they reported it, but that they “think those people still go to [SCPWI].” After Mothman disclosed this incident to the group, there was a back-and-forth conversation regarding frustrations with SCPWI’s handling of racist events on campus the past few years.

Makeda: Nothing ever really happens.
Mothman: That’s the scary part, I think.
Makeda: Like, when that stuff [racist incidents on campus] happens.
Mothman: It’s kind of, like, swept under the rug. It’s all about image control. That’s really scary to me because people are having their lives threatened a lot.
Ladybug: It really just feels like we’re, in my mind, like a political moment when people are kind of deciding … their priorities. Like, we have these milquetoast liberals—like, in 2018 you really gotta make the decision. What are you more concerned with? Like, the appearance of USC as an image, or [trails off].
Mothman: People’s lives.
Ladybug: Yeah, people’s lives [hesitates] and justice. And it feels more—I don’t know, like, if not more dramatic than ever, we like reaching for the [trails off]

Leia: Like, performative?

Ladybug: Yeah. Because it is like things are getting worse. We’ve got more Nazis out in the streets than in recent years, and it’s going to keep getting worse. And people are going to have to, like, make the decision. [pause] You know, people talking about … our culture, so what, like, ‘It’s too polarized and we’ve got to fix that.’ And it’s like, y’all, we’re not going to fix the polarization; we just gotta make a decision [trails off].

I don’t know what happened as a result of the GroupMe chat, but I know that when students at SCPWI expressed racist, nativist, or otherwise oppressive sentiments, rarely did they ever find themselves in trouble with the upper administration. That same year, in the summer of 2016, an incoming student yelled “Build the wall” at a woman on campus in hijab. This incoming student was part of a small group in an extended orientation program, but no disciplinary action was taken. Often, in my personal experience, when something of this nature would happen, students of color would rise to the defense of the target of the oppressive act, and then the administration would reach out to the perpetrator to ensure he or she was safe from the students of Color.
**SCPWI Educator Failure, Leadership Failure**

Since the candidacy of Trump, more-and-more-blatant racist, misogynist, and nativist incidents have happened on campus. One major incident happened during the semester of this data collection. A class at SCPWI had been talking one day about public assistance, and the professor erroneously stated that the majority of individuals on public assistance are people of color (Jan, 2017). When a black woman’s cell phone rang, the professor reportedly said, “That may be the welfare office calling you now” (Dear, 2018, p. n.p.; Gaither, 2018).

The president of SCPWI and the university’s official Twitter account reached out to the student quickly, and the professor in question has a long-established track record of racist and sexist incidents on campus. This episode served, in part, to generate the art by Leia (Figure 5.16). She recounted that this art was a reflection of “thinking about graduation and thinking about everything that’s happening with Professor [Smith] and the [his] department, who I hate.” Leia here was referring to the professor referenced above. Leia has taken courses by him because she has a double major, one of which is in his home department, and two of his courses are required. According to her, “he’s made incredibly inappropriate comments and said, like, very very not OK things in classes and said very horrifying things, and no one would listen to me when I told them.” When Leia told faculty in Professor [Smith]’s department about him saying horrid things, they would often respond by saying, “It’s just the way it is, and he’s just very conservative and has those views.” And I was like, ‘You can’t say those things.’”
Leia also had some disturbing experiences with a staff member at SCPWI. Leia’s plans were to go to graduate school to study genocide, and she was very passionate about anti-oppressive education—genocide education in particular. She has done work in the past with bringing materials into middle school classrooms to lead discussions regarding the Holocaust. One of Leia’s primary passions in activism was to create change through uncomfortable dialogue. Leia stated that “genocide education is my calling” and that it is one of those uncomfortable topics, because “people shut down when you are like, ‘Let’s talk about genocide.’ People are freaked out, and it’s totally reasonable that people can’t do it. Like, your brain is … not able to comprehend” the magnitude of genocide.

Leia had an experience with a “very well-respected human being, like, ‘I don’t think anyone’s old enough to learn about this.’” At first, the faculty member made a joke about Leia’s efforts to bring a genocide education exhibit into middle schools, and whether the exhibit was appropriate for that age level. Leia replied that there are certain panels of the exhibit that are removed for younger audiences, but she stood by her decision to start these conversations early, as “it’s important to teach someone these, like, basic concepts because they … otherwise have no tools … to learn from.” She was very disturbed that this senior lecturer, who has a prominent role on campus and with diverse student populations, was uncomfortable talking about genocide. She questioned how this could come from someone whose “whole job is to, like, understand and work with people who come from different backgrounds and face different issues. How can you, like, relieve yourself [of] the responsibility of learning about things that are too big for you to handle?”
Mothman reflected on feelings about the way the institution has handled many instances of public racism on campus. Mothman was highly suspicious of any office related to diversity issues on campus that is involved with university money. “The Board of Trustees try to frame it [discussions about oppression] in a way that will help them, and that’s where I think it gets insidious.”

Mothman came in as a political science and math major, and when they felt uncomfortable in those areas, they changed their major to women and gender studies. They felt that throughout the university, the “grand culture at [SCPWI] is something that’s kind of insidious” and that it was the “exact same culture of my high school. High school was a really scary experience for me and was a place where I was bullied a lot, and, like, that’s why I didn’t want to go to [SCPWI] initially.” Mothman felt that the culture at SCPWI was deeply “toxic,” but that there were some spaces that nurtured diversity and inclusion, such as the GSA, the feminist student organization, and the multicultural center.

Mothman expressed deep frustration with institutional politics, particularly pertaining to undergraduate admissions. They placed the blame squarely at the feet of the university president, stating that “we’re still, like, 8% black when the state of South Carolina is, like, 35%, and that’s really problematic.” For these reasons, when the president of SCPWI tweeted about racial diversity or made public statements about it, Mothman was frustrated at the discrepancy between his words and his actions.

Sky Blue Banana’s art stated that “SOCIETY NEEDS” “EDUCATION,” with a word bubble containing the words “start a conversation.” Her piece also called on
passion. A common assumption is that education exists for the basic good of society, but an extensive critique of education positions education as an institution that reproduces normative values (Giroux, 1985; Labaree, 1997). SCPWI’s failure to speak back to White supremacist discourses illustrates that education reifies these discourses rather than challenges them.

Figure 5.25 Sky Blue Banana

The experiences shared by these artists are egregious examples of some of the narratives I have heard from students over my time working at SCPWI. While Professor [Smith] was confronted with video after one of these incidents, this is by far not the only thing he has done. Nor is he unique in saying offensive things to students. As I referenced previously, I have heard voice recordings of an upper-level administrator calling an undergraduate student activist “uppity.” This is not a localized problem. I have long been a member of a Facebook group for student affairs professionals that is perhaps one of the most toxic spaces I have ever experienced. Views such as those espoused by Professor [Smith] often come up when individuals who express inclusive views post. Echoing the conversation between D.Prince and Ladybug earlier, when individuals in this group are
forced to confront their privilege, they lash out in anger. So, it is unsurprising to hear that these activists have experienced bias from the very people who are supposed to support and educate them.

I have seen how SCPWI has hampered not only my activism, but that of students. The work of creating more inclusive spaces for marginalized groups is often on the backs of those very communities (Weiser & Wagner, 2017). Moreover, these communities feel that they cannot share their emotions or plans with their mentors, and they instead sequester themselves in a “hell hole” (Randall, 2017). Some of these students are not comfortable being out, or challenging White supremacist narratives, due largely to their experiences of being shut down, or of the institution coming to the defense of White supremacist narratives.

**Theme 8: Social Media**

The artists, when tasked with choosing pseudonyms for themselves for digital scheduling purposes, mostly chose unconventional names. Many wrote down names more likely to be found on Tumblr or Reddit than in real life. I explained that they could choose whatever name they liked and joked that this could be their “top-secret identity.” Many of them (eight of the 14) chose nonhuman pseudonyms: Angel_Rainbow_Daisy (the first name chosen—it was her middle school screen name, made from the names of her rabbits), Ladybug, Mothman, CatsAreBetterThanDogs420, Radically Soft, Sparkle Enby (Enby being short for nonbinary), Sky Blue Banana, and Homogoblin (who wanted this name as a Tumblr account, but it was already taken). One more name was Makeda, which came from an ancient queen of Ethiopia. Unsurprisingly, conversations regarding
social media also arose during our time together. These conversations were unrelated to
the pseudonyms; the artists all engaged with one another using their real names and did
not know one another’s pseudonyms.

**Salient Point: Unsafe Digital Spaces**

Anxiety surrounding social media was interesting to me, because all of these
millennial artists used social media pretty regularly. I recruited for the project by passing
out flyers at a large-scale campus social event and talking about the project in a guest
lecture I gave, but most of the participants discovered the study through social media,
where I recruited through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and GroupMe.

One artist in particular had deep anxiety about one form of social media: Twitter. After Claire shared that she had decided to put self-care on hold while trying to finish school and felt guilty about this, Leia suggested some TED Talks\(^\text{44}\) that might help Claire adopt better self-care techniques. Leia then stated that the speaker she was recommending was “really funny on the internet,” to which Claire responded, “I need a Twitter. Do I need a Twitter? What’s your feeling about that?” Leia and others responded that in general they liked Twitter, but Claire had reservations. She said that everywhere she turns, people “always talk about Twitter, and I’m like, maybe this is where people that I like [are], because they’re not on Facebook, I can tell you that! I feel like all the cool people are on Twitter.” This echoed Claire’s earlier concerns about finding community and feeling lonely. Her community had recently been full of transition, with many of the

\(^{44}\) Short talks delivered at a conference hosted by TED Conferences, LLC that are hosted online and shared
friends she had made her first time in college leaving town and moving on. Here, she was cautiously asking her fellow artists for their takes on Twitter. However, every time someone seemingly came to the defense of Twitter, Claire questioned their rationale.

Leia stated that she limits the people she follows on Twitter to those who are “actually interesting and funny and, like, have hot takes\(^{45}\) and things that are important to me.” But she had admitted earlier on that she saw Twitter as this “useless thing—like, I don’t care if you’re eating a sandwich right now” (a common critique of Twitter at its inception).

Leia described using Twitter to learn about relevant issues concerning social justice. She spoke about following one person in particular who had an “easy broken-down thread of, like, why this humanitarian crisis is important, and because it’s only five tweets of 180 characters, people will actually read it.” This rationale resonated with me, not just because it captured how millennials learn a great deal of information through social media, but also because it spoke to the way visual data, such as the art we were producing, might make more of an impact than written research could potentially produce.

Further, Leia explained that social media can be curated so that you get these threads of information, with some “dank memes\(^{46}\) in between” that serve as self-care and an opportunity to laugh while learning information. Claire questioned whether this format

\(^{45}\) Slang for quick commentary produced quickly in response to a recent event.

\(^{46}\) Slang for cool and funny images on the internet that often reference culture and are based on a repetitive visual style.
“oversimplifies problems” and is reflective of “people’s unwillingness to read long things.” She stated that that unwillingness was “problematic for [her] because, you know, you … see something and you’re like, ‘OK,’ but this is [only] one facet of this problem.” She wondered what people might be missing by learning this way. Leia admitted that this was a problem, but that it was important to find a “middle ground [with] something that is accessible to people; otherwise, they might never see that information at all.” Social media was particularly useful for the artists who held jobs in addition to their school and other life experiences.

Claire blamed a “broken education system” for creating a culture so rife with short attention spans that it necessitates an obsession with tweets. She thought that we need to re-instill that, you know, it is OK to spend three hours reading something and really understanding it. Like, you can take that time, and you will have a better understanding of it, instead of just reading it on social media—little snippets of information that don’t actually really tell you anything.

Homogoblin immediately responded that she feels that Claire’s thoughts are “definitely valid.” But as someone “who works full time,” Homogoblin doubted she herself had “the energy to do that [spend three hours reading].” Homogoblin and Claire agreed that this may be a larger problem with “our work environment.” Ultimately, Homogoblin still thought that “it’s nice to get those snippets … if they are good” and that you “have to find the good ones [to follow].”
CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 supported Homogoblin’s thoughts, remarking that he doesn’t “always have time, and if I get, like, 10 minutes to be on my phone on Twitter … I can still see what’s current and I can, you know, see stuff in [sic] 140 characters rather than, like, a five-page thing.” He thought this was productive for his engaged, albeit busy, activist agenda when he did not have time to read or watch the news in other ways.

Claire questioned whether CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 felt that “your understanding of issues is surface level because of that.” CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 replied at length, describing how he did not think it was, as social media allowed him to “talk to people about things—like, if I see something online,” rather than spending what little time he has reading that “five-page document.” Moreover, sometimes his peers also “have more information” to supplement what he saw, and together they could create a more accurate image. Anytime something happens on social media, he immediately talked with his “roommates about it when I get home, and I’m like, ‘Oh my god … Trump did this’ or whatever. And, you know, even if I only saw … the tweet about it or the one that he made,” it allows CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 and his roommates to stay current on politics and current affairs.

Moreover, CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 also leveraged new media for donations. Many people are turning to social payment methods to raise money to cover costs associated with life when their own employment is not enough. Websites such as YouPay, GoFundMe, DonorsChoose, YouCaring, and GiveForward enable people to ask the general public to help support any kind of cause. CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 shared how he knows individuals who have used it because they “can’t afford rent this month”
and that “people share links like that through social media and get hundreds of dollars, if not thousands sometimes in the case of surgeries. And it can happen in a matter of minutes.” He had done this himself once with a surgery, and “within 10 minutes of me having shared the donation link that I have [for my top surgery], somebody donated 200 dollars. One person. And, so, social media is very helpful.” He did admit that social media could be “be hurtful at times,” with targeted attacks on individuals, and that it could be used for “malignant purposes.”

Subtheme: Fake News and Information Literacy in an Age of Activism

Beyond personal attacks, CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 spoke about the insidious nature of “fake news.” A term popularized in 2016, fake news is a form of yellow journalism designed to drown out free speech by flooding the speech marketplace with disinformation (Tufekci, 2018). The term fake news was also deployed by Trump to discredit the media, calling news that paints him in an unflattering light “fake.” He has gone so far to create the Fake News Awards (Borchers, 2018). With the presence of fake news, the onus is on the consumer of ideas more than ever to fact-check sources. CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 argued that this is one of the malignant uses of social media. He lamented that sometimes not-true information—like, you know, especially with fake news and everything … you always have to go out and … fact-check … for sure. But, you know, I think that it can still be—even if it’s fake news [or] whatever, stuff gets shared. And I think that it’s a good way to put information out there, whether it’s
true or not … especially with everything where Trump will say something is fake news, and then, like, Fox News will say something is fake news, and CNN will say something else is fake news [trails off].

This scenario, in which different sources have different opinions of what is fake news, brought me back to the works of Renshon et al. (2015) and Song (2017). These two pieces addressed the ways that emotions and politics shaped the consumption of news. While CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 named three sources (Trump, Fox News, and CNN), his affect after speaking about CNN indicated that in this scenario, it was largely Trump and Fox News saying that CNN had fake news. This supported Song’s (2017) finding that political leanings have an impact on news sources. Song (2017) found that politically conservative people were less likely than politically liberal individuals to consume content from counterattitudinal sources. In this case, CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 is showing bias toward more liberal news sources, but not completely disavowing more conservative news sources, which supported Song’s (2017) assertion.

CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 shared

you kinda have to go and make that decision for yourself, and social media sharing articles and, like, videos and tweets that Trump has made … kind of lets you make your own decisions, when you have everything so easily accessible and that people have shared.

Homogoblin agreed, stating that “you just have to be responsible and … check your sources to actually to check and see where you were coming from, what was the source of” the information.
Claire laid some of the blame for fake news proliferation at the feet of older users of Facebook, “especially with older people learning to Facebook and, like, not being able to tell the difference between fake news and real news.” This was reflected in some of her earlier comments about the people she might like to follow being on Twitter, as they “aren’t on Facebook, I can tell you that.” Leia believed that “media literacy” was important for ensuring that individuals were able to understand the source of information.

Discussion

I start this section by exploring the role of activism and resistance in the artists’ creations. I then move to the role that identity had in their art and activism. From there, I address the history of organizing and its impact on the artists’ work, and move to the role SCPWI played in their work. I explore the artists’ generational identity and how that has impacted their activism and emotions and their role in the artists’ activism. I also engage in a discussion of queer theory and how some aspects of it may shed light on particular elements of this study, and I close this discussion by looking at the role that social media plays in the artists’ activism.

Activism and Resistance

Resistance played a central role in the activism of these artists. Largely, this resistance was centered on rejection of discourses surrounding their identities. For some, their resistance existed beyond their own identity, with some of them, such as Leia and Makeda, calling for attention to intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). Particularly, the word resist, related often to a culture of resistance against the Trump presidency, was used in the visual poem by Mothman and Ladybug, the art by Sparkle Enby, and the work by
Leia. These pieces outright speak to resistance against an oppressive governmental system.

Resistance to governmental discourses has been central as well to many movements across time and location. Kotliar (2016) illustrated the way that activists in Palestine and Israel resisted governmental sanctions on emotions. Moreover, Clough (2012), building on Bosco (2007) and Chatterton (2008), argued that progressive activists used affective structures to bind groups together (Ahmed, 2014) in resistance to conservative politics. These artists resisted conservative politics through their art and conversations with one another. In particular, the work by Makeda directly expressed the idea of community being attacked by the “hate rays” of a “Trump-o’-lantern.” Specifically, Makeda called on the notions of “love,” “music,” “conversation,” “coalition,” and “community” as aspects that “interrupt bigots.” As such, her piece directly engaged with the notion that communities and coalitions can interrupt the bigotry that stems from the hate rays generated by conservative politics, as manifested in the president.

Other works of resistance were more subtle. The art created by Mark also spoke to a resistance to conservative politics but was more restrained in its language. His piece spoke to notions of community through language that states, “DEFEND & PROTECT ME TODAY SO I MAY LIVE TO DEFEND & PROTECT YOU TOMORROW” and “I’M HERE & I STAND WITH & FOR THOSE WHO CAN’T BE HERE. JUST AS I STAND WITH THOSE BESIDE ME. I FIGHT FOR YOU EVEN IF YOU CAN’T FIGHT FOR YOURSELF.” This notion of community protection speaks to the way that
communities may engage with and beyond one another, working together to resist embodied oppressive natures. In particular, I think of the Black Panther Party and its work in supporting a community to build a community’s capacity (Seale, 1996). Moreover, activists have long worked across movements to help support one another (Kauffman, 2017).

**Identity, Art, Activism, and Resistance**

The artists’ salient identities were clear through their artwork. This was particularly evident in the works by Angel_Rainbow_Daisy, CatsAreBetterThanDogs420, Claire, D.Prince, Homogoblin, and Sparkle Enby. Each of these artists connected identity to the role it plays in their respective activisms. Thus, it must be acknowledged that the salient identities these artists embody play a significant role in their activism.

Leavy (2017) expressed that exploring identity is a particularly fruitful use of arts-based research. Many of the pieces produced in this research were fruitful in the exploration of self and identity. Further, the pieces of art, as well as the conversations had while creating the art, signaled resistance to the contemporary political moment—sometimes directly to President Trump, for example in Makeda’s Trump-o’-lantern and the hate rays attacking the blue orb made up of the elements that Makeda named as part of a community. Resistance was also present in Leia and CatsAreBetterThanDogs420’s explicit critique of The NRA’s role in the contemporary debate surrounding gun legislation.
Angel_Rainbow_Daisy’s piece reflected Latinx power through the deployment of hashtags and her poetry. Significantly, her piece also signaled a rejection of nativist immigration rhetoric espoused by Trump and many on the political right. This piece was explicit in its rejection of and resistance to right-wing nativist narratives about immigrants. Moreover, her piece challenged the narrative that immigrants were “bad hombres”—instead, she said, these immigrants were those who “get the job done.”

Mothman and Ladybug created a piece that centered on a critique of capitalism. This reflected resistance to Trump’s conservative approach to the economy and capitalism, his withdrawal from trade deals, and his commitment to removing economic regulations. These moves reflect an economic worldview aligned with the interests of corporations rather than of individuals. This is perhaps best exemplified by the 2017 tax reform that, among other things, abolished the estate tax and permanently cut the corporate tax rate from 35% to 15% (Thomas, 2017). These two decisions benefitted corporations and the wealthy, despite Trump’s assertions that the rich would not be gaining from this plan.

Sparkle Enby’s piece, and CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 and Leia’s piece, also reflected an identity-based resistance to the political moment. Sparkle Enby’s work, with the combined symbols for dis/ability and the trans community and the word “RESIST” underneath, called us to center and focus on the narratives and experiences of trans folx and/or people with disabilities. Moreover, the piece by CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 and Leia called our attention to political and legal equality for LGB people, highlighting the
recently decided Masterpiece Cakeshop v. CO CRC case. These two pieces were calls to resist structures of able-bodied cisgender heterosexual hegemonies.

Mark’s piece, which used the words “DESTROYING NATIONS ENDS CONVERSATIONS,” calls our attention to the ongoing threat of nuclear war. It should be noted that after the creation of this piece, a meeting between North and South Korea, as well as between the leaders of North Korea and the United States, was scheduled for summer 2018 (Fifield, Nakamura, & Kim, 2018). Whereas these pieces were explicit in their calls to resist the contemporary political environment, some pieces expressed this more implicitly.

For instance, Claire’s two pieces reflected on her sexuality and the role it has played in her lived experiences. Her first piece, which depicted a very detailed brain made of pink and red glitter glue, has two statements in speech bubbles coming out of the brain: “When you think about something you infuse your life energy into it. Attention is power.” “Take good notes so you will run across them in the future and be inspired by what you learned again and again.” Above the brain, the phrase “balance your life”, highlighted with blue glitter glue and outlined in sparkled silver glitter glue, calls attention to the PTSD, anxiety, and depression that Claire spoke about both in this piece and in conversation with me and the other artists. Part of Claire’s resistance was taking care of herself, so that she could “blossom.”

This blossoming was central to her other work. Claire’s second piece depicted a flower on a red, square piece of paper, and a statement that “life is messy.” This flower opened to reveal four aspects of herself that brought her joy: music, writing, kids, and the
law. Centered on a yellow central part of the flower, reflective of a stamen, was the word “feelings”. This piece, like the petals, also opened, to reveal the phrase “my activism” underlined three times. This piece reflected that Claire’s activism is hidden beneath her feelings and the aspects of her life that bring her joy.

Interconnectivity was central to these activists’ self-care and mental health as well. This was illustrated in the way Claire and Homogoblin felt their loneliness and lack of connections as a stressor, but it was also illustrated by Ladybug and Mothman in their art depicting a cosmic commune. Further, interconnectivity was illustrated in several artists’ use of in-group language and symbols.

Radically Soft’s piece was another that signals to an in-community with phrases and symbols whose significance may be lost on people not in the know. These symbols specifically referenced the LGBT and Black communities through the use of a rainbow and a raised fist. Moreover, the phrase, “don’t yuck my yum” was prevalent within sex positive and kink communities. These subdued statements camouflage commitments to particular communities through use of in-group language—a subversive resistance to cisgender heterosexual White supremacist hegemonies.

Leia’s work reflected clear focus on “resistance” and figuring out how to achieve the aims of a resistance. Collaboration, coordination, and intersectional approaches to activism are important, and “exhaustion” was real, according to this piece. For Leia, the act of “literally show[ing] up” was important. She highlighted that “There is no wrong way to do activism — as long as it’s intersectional.”
While the individual identities of these artists were significant in the activism they engaged in, some of them also spoke about engaging in activism with communities that they don’t belong to. Mark spoke about standing with and fighting for others who cannot “fight” for themselves. Leia, who was an outsider in the South, engaging in activism in a space she did not grow up in, also spoke to a southern context through her piece that reflected the narratives she heard at SCPWI. D.Prince specifically named the communities he belonged to in text on his work: “cis,” “Black,” “male,” “straight.” Moreover, on his work, he also drew a cross. While faith was central to D.Prince’s identity and activism, he acknowledged tension between progressive activism and Christianity.

For many of these artists, being an activist is part of who they are and, further, whom they associate with. Mothman and D.Prince explicitly spoke to activism as a social activity, a way to make friends and to support them. D.Prince stated that “learning from others is what defines the landscape of my activism” and that this is why he “took scraps from neighbors and friends” to create his art; his “actions and activism are purely shaped by those around [him].” Askins (2009) argued that many activists just have a feeling that they have to engage in activism. Mothman sought out progressive communities to find other people to engage in activism with, which is how Mothman met Ladybug. Other artists found themselves attached to an office on campus that helped support their work. Similar to the ways Ellsworth and Burns (1970) argued that activism was as American as apple pie, these artists engaged in activism as part of who they were.
While many of the artists struggled to think of themselves as artists as I discussed as a potential limitation in Chapter 3, identifying as an activist was not as much as a struggle. In conversations prior to the beginning of the project, while some individuals expressed apprehension about engagement with in an art-based project, no one expressed apprehension regarding the notion of activism or resistance. The flyer for the project (Appendix A) openly recruited those who had “feelings about the contemporary political moment” for a study entitled “Arts of Resistance Research”. While no one expressed openly to me that they did not see themselves as activists in the recruitment stage, two artists did express apprehension about their level of activism, due in part to fear of repercussion from employers: Claire and Homogoblin.

While this project was largely about activism, rhetorically “activism” was not a theme, but “resistance to oppression” (Theme 4) was. In this theme I discussed both identity and political resistance. I believe that activism was woven throughout representations in Themes 2 (Building Community), 6 Mental Health, Self-Care, and Guilt), and 7 (The South) in particular.

**History of Organizing**

These activists did not illustrate through their art or in our conversations whether they thought of their acts of resistance as an extension of historical organizing traditions or as new manifestations of resistance. For them, their acts were located in the here and now. I draw on literature to see the connections between their shared experiences and the activism and resistance of their forebears.
The legacy of the civil rights movement is palpable in the movements of today (Milkman, 2017). Milkman described the activism enacted by millennials as combining traditions of the Old Left and New Left. The Old Left, or pre-1960s left, tended toward a Marxist cultural critique, paying attention to class. The New Left, which began in the 1960s paid closer attention to identity. Mothman and Ladybug supported the notion of an intersection of identity politics with a rejection of capitalism. These two artists critiqued capitalism, calling it partially to blame for racial inequality. Their poem uses the words “resent economy” and “wealth is brutality” in conjunction with symbolism that referenced anti-racist and queer identities. Their work acknowledged the intersections of a critique of capitalism with the realities of cisgender heterosexual White supremacist hegemonies.

Moreover, while this was not echoed in the art or in our conversations, Makeda arrived at our third gathering wearing a shirt with a Black Panther Party (BPP) logo and the words “Seize the time.” I believe the shirt represents the importance of BPP’s fight for economic and racial justice. I know that after our gathering, she went to a vigil for Sasha Wall, a Black trans woman who was murdered in South Carolina.

The artists did not explicitly call on the history of an organizing tradition through their conversations or their artwork, except in one piece by Leia. Leia called on the idea of young activists today connecting with the “elders of the protest movement like Rep. John Lewis” in her art. Congressman John Lewis, an African American leader serving the 5th District in Georgia, was, as chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating
Committee (SNCC), one of the “Big Six” who helped organize and spoke at the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (Carson, 1995).

I was reminded during our times together of the ways that activists tend to learn from one another. If it were not for Leia, the art the rest of the group created might have been largely two-dimensional. Instead, because of her offer to help and the reception she received when she offered, a number of creations were interactive and three-dimensional. This peer-to-peer support was evidenced in the attention artists paid to what other artists shared with them and in the collaborative creations of some of the art pieces. This same kind of peer support was evidenced through the use of the people’s mic in the Occupy Movement, a tactic learned from the protests of the 1990s against the World Trade Organization (Gitlin, 2012; Kahn, 2011). Likewise, the individuals from the Occupy movement of Chicago came down to assist the protesters in Ferguson after the shooting of Michael Brown (Kauffman, 2017). These activists, like Leia, knew that what was being created was not theirs, but they provided support and help to the other activists anyway.

Researchers (Crossley, 2008; Forenza & J. Germak, 2015; Rhoads, 2000; Tessema, 2015) have documented well the importance of developing community to the establishment of a larger activist movement. This includes positioning knowledge as something to be freely shared (Kauffman, 2017). Moreover, activism has long been a part of the experience of young adults. Scholars such as Rhoads (2000) and Ellsworth and Burns (1970) have documented the experience of activism on college campuses. Moreover, Cohen and Snyder (2013) illustrated how young adult activists have helped
shape their college campuses to be more inclusive for marginalized communities. The artists in this project used their progressive activisms to engender and build community. The building of community was a central experience for these artists, and when they did not find community, its absence had impacts on their lives, as spoken to by Claire and Homogoblin.

**Loss, Art, Methodology, and Community**

As I discussed earlier, I believe that the experience of creating art collaboratively, and individually in a shared space, helped to engender community and forge new relationships. D.Prince expressed how he had become friends with Mark through meeting him at our first meeting. In addition, through the awkward tentativeness of creating art, some of these artists began to feel comfortable enough to seek and receive help from other artists. This was best expressed by Homogoblin who said “we” (as a group) accept all levels of artistic talent. The self-doubt of many of the artists over their artistic abilities to create the zines became a shared experience for some. In future interviews with each individual artist I plan to explore the idea of community and hear their interpretations of our gatherings.

I see vulnerability echoed in my own feelings becoming lost within this project. As I discussed in Chapter 3, this project was in part about getting lost. Becoming lost not only in the project and the data but in the design and methodology as well. It was the critical dissatisfaction (Muñoz, 2009) with other methods in part, that drew me to collaborative, arts-based work My own experience in getting lost within this project made

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me experience some of the very same self-doubt that the artists felt, and I believe helped us build community. While the awkwardness to creating art is not the same as resisting oppressive governments or sharing an experience of racial oppression, it is the shared moment that helped to create relationships with one another (Kayes, Kaye, & Kolb, 2005).

Among other connections, I think the self-doubt and feeling of loss helped to engender community. This loss was manifested as vulnerability of ability. I think of the work of CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 and his making and remaking his first piece over and over, and I think of Claire who remarked that she used to be “so much” better at creating art as examples. Further, the loss of community also served as a reality for some of these artists. Claire and Homogoblin were not able to engage fully in their communities due to their fear of being discovered as queer women. Many of the artists expressed loss of relationships with their own families due to their disagreements over political beliefs. Loss was a powerful emotion expressed in their art and in our gatherings.

Activism and SCPWI

Many of these artists served as activist killjoys, challenging bias incidents that occurred on campus (Ahmed, 2017). This rejection of the status quo in different forms was present in many of these works of art: transgressing a status quo through the art of Angel_Rainbow_Daisy; expressing frustration with the status quo, as illustrated by the art of CatsAreBetterThanDogs420; or subverting the status quo, as seen in the art by Ladybug and Mothman, Leia, and Claire.
Engagement with LGBT activism was central for many of the artists. This was expressed through the art of CatsAreBetterThanDogs420, Radically Soft, Sparkle Enby, Claire, and Homogoblin. Rhoads (2000) found that student activism in the 1990s was in response to conservative politics throughout the 1980s. I believe these artists have faced similar conservatism. Makeda, Homogoblin, and Ladybug shared that they faced forces of conservatism in their families. These forces had an influence on their work. Mothman, Ladybug, and Leia spoke to the forces of conservativism on the campus of SCPWI, and conservatism’s impact on their work.

Mothman and Ladybug wanted to encourage SCPWI to stop selling apparel in the campus bookstore that originated in sweatshops. Leia was involved in campus conversations regarding sexual assault, through her involvement in the leadership of the feminist student organization. Angel_Rainbow_Daisy organized events on campus to raise visibility for Latinx students, as well as to highlight the experiences of DREAMers. Many of the artists engaged in this project held leadership positions in progressive student organizations at SCPWI. Angel_Rainbow_Daisy was the two-time president of the Latinx student organization; Leia was the vice-president of a campus feminist organization. During this project, CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 became co-president of the campus feminist organization. Claire, during her first time at SCPWI, was the vice-president of the gay–straight alliance; and Ladybug was the founder of the democratic socialist student organization, replaced by Mothman when his term ended. Thus, student leadership was a salient experience for many of these students.

**Millennials: Apathetic? Or Busy?**
Millennials are often blamed for everything, so much so that it has become a joke. Millennials often are blamed when things change, from napkins to engagement rings to department stores to homeownership rates (Paul, 2017). Millennials have been called lazy, selfish, and apathetic, branded the “Me Generation” (Stein, 2013). This is not true, at least in the case of these artists. As shown above, at least six of these 14 artists held leadership positions during their time at SCPWI. Further, the artists echo the work of McElwee (2016), who argued that millennials are more progressive than their parents. The conversations these artists had with their parents for progressive issues illustrate the findings of McElwee (2016).

Like Stein (2013) illustrated about millennials, these artists are complex and nuanced. They are busy. They care about the world and injustice. They also recognize the ways that capitalism affects their life experiences. This is illustrated by Claire’s and Homogoblin’s feelings of being trapped and lonely due to the problem of discrimination due to their sexuality by their religious employers. Further, at SCPWI, taking a role in student leadership is often cast as a way of making one more attractive to potential employers. This reflects a neoliberal influence on the student experience—the goal is not to prepare leaders, but to prepare business leaders.

CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 spoke about how his peers were too busy to get involved in activism. As someone who often cannot attend protests due to school, work, and parenthood, I am sympathetic. Are we genuinely too busy? Or would we rather spend our time elsewhere? Homogoblin argued that the advent of social media allowed her to learn more than she could have if she had to sit down to watch the news or read
something longer than a tweet. These artists are millennials, and millennials are busy. Seelig (2018) suggested that community engagement by millennials drops off significantly between high school and college, and I argue that for these artists, this is due to the number of things going on in their lives. Between this project, classwork, employment, and relationships (romantic or otherwise), I believe that engaging in activism was, for these artists, quite a bit of a balancing act. To engage in sustained activism reflects a position of privilege. This is true in many communities. Spending an abundance of time vigorously campaigning for a cause takes just that—time. Time spent campaigning is not time spent on labor. Certainly, activists labor, but participating in activist movement invites questions about who has the economic security and stability and or flexibility in labor production to participate in movements—typically, the working class is working.

Leia’s notion of “reactive existence” is helpful here as well. As a double-majoring senior who was also vice-president of a student organization, as well as pursuing other campus-based leadership opportunities, Leia represented many of the involved students at SCPWI. It is not unusual for passionate students to hold that many positions on campus. Her idea of “reactive existence” (“just existing in addition to being able to do what I care about”), on top of the typical exhaustion that young adults face, compounds the stress in her life. Despite the messaging about millennials being apathetic, I have seen millennials who are passionate about and dedicated to ideas of justice.

Emotion’s Guiding Force
Coding for emotion by paying attention to the words and inflection of the artists, I found that they were quite driven by emotions. Sometimes the emotion was one of guilt, acting as an interruption for Claire or, in the case of Ladybug, felt as an inspiration to do activism.

Love was a significant emotion shared by the artists. This love was demonstrated in their art, in their actions toward one another during our meetings, and in their words. I saw their sharing of emotions, and their shared emotions, as pieces that helped engender community. The artists shared experiences of anger and resistance to White supremacist hegemonies expressed by family members, and they also shared resistance to these hegemonies through their experiences with educators at SCPWI. Moreover, the artists expressed a shared feeling of resistance to the oppression coded as “southern” or “fashy”. This resistance to narratives about the South, and their mutual experiences with living in this space, bound the artists together. The artists expressed frustration with the failure of educators at SCPWI to create a space that was inclusive of historically marginalized communities. Further, these artists were bound together through their empathy for and commitment to oppressed communities. Ahmed (2004) argued that the transmission of emotions binds people together. These shared experiences that elicited emotions helped build community. I argue that this community was evidenced in the support the artists provided one another in this project, and also in their willingness to share deeply personal narratives with one another.

Askins (2009) and Brown and Pickerill (2009) argued that binding individuals together through emotion engenders activism. Mothman described a failure to find
community with the College Democrats, who pushed Mothman out for being too progressive. Therefore, Mothman had to find another community with which to engage in activism, one that was more progressive than the College Democrats. Additionally, D. Prince stated that his activism was largely reflective of the people he surrounded himself with.

Spinoza (1677/1992) focused on the affects of hope and fear. Ahmed (2014) argued that hope for a better tomorrow engenders activism. She argued that without hope, there is no protest or activism. I argued in Chapter 2 that while activism without hope is rare, it can happen. I illustrated this by looking at the Occupy Wall Street movement, which faced overwhelming odds. Likewise, the hopeful aspirations of Mothman and YDS to get SCPWI to stop buying from companies that use sweatshop labor may seem unattainable, but there is generativity in the possibility of success and in failure (Halberstam, 2011). Moreover, the consistent resistance to SCPWI faculty and administrators who perpetuated White supremacist hegemonies signaled a belief that SCPWI can do better. Like the research by Sørensen (2017), failure may still elicit conversations that can produce generative outcomes.

Rodgers (2010) explored the role of emotion in nonprofit workers. He found that emotions were not enough to sustain activism. This resonated in the conversation led by Leia, who spoke about living a “reactive existence” and the “exhaustion” of living in a space in which you are not wanted. Leia’s piece that reimagined the message incoming students receive called attention to the way that SCPWI wanted students to engage in leadership experiences, engagement but not disruption of the status quo. Moreover, her
other piece spoke to a perpetual teaching of empathy: “I DON’T KNOW HOW TO EXPLAIN TO YOU THAT YOU SHOULD CARE ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE.” These two pieces reflect her calling of living in spaces where one is perpetually a challenge to dominant narratives. This created her reactive experience.

**Emotions and Discourse**

I believe that emotions are a manifestation of power (Ahmed, 2014; Lutz, 2002). Emotions exist in a discursive world where they are in relations of force that those in power—namely White masculine cisgender heterosexuals (Butler, 2011; Foucault, 1978)—exploit in order to include or exclude them. As I shared in Chapter 2, I anticipated that these artists, speaking from their situatedness (Haraway, 1988), would challenge and confront dominant discourses, namely Whiteness, masculinity, heterosexuality, cisgender, and able-bodiedness. I found that many of these dominant discourses were challenged directly through the art—for example, in Angel_Rainbow_Daisy active resistance to White masculine nativist narratives around Latinas, and in Sparkle Enby’s call to other gender-nonconforming crips to “RESIST.”

Moreover, sometimes these resistances came through conversations about challenging dominant regional and national norms, such as in Leia’s work in challenging SCPWI to be more inclusive, and in CatsAreBetterThanDogs420’s conversations with his parents about race and religion—or more passively, such as when Makeda wore a Black Panther Party shirt. Sometimes these resistances were illustrated through both art and conversation, such as in Ladybug and Mothman’s visual poem, which illustrated the
southern cross on fire, as well as in what they shared about their leadership experiences at SCPWI and their active engagement in socialist movements.

Moreover, these artists challenged the notion that progressives and liberals were overemotional snowflakes (Friedersdorf, 2015). In particular, Ladybug directly confronted his stepfather, as well as Mothman’s grandfather, for pro-capitalist and intolerant views, describing his stepfather as a “snowflake” who was unable to think about others’ perspectives. The artists directly took on those who would challenge their agency (Friedersdorf, 2015; Serwer, 2017), turning the pejorative “snowflake” on its head and using it against those who initially deployed this term against them.

I argue that these actions, which come from a place of considering other people as central to one’s own lifeworld, are astounding. These artists’ actions represent their passionate commitment to persevere against and resist hegemonies that privilege a select few. Personally, although I saw myself as liberal in college, voting Democrat was as engaged as I got. While I came to my progressive activism tendencies later in life, most of these activists came to their awakening far earlier than I did. Evidence of their level of activism at their age may underscore McElwee’s point (2016) that millennials are more progressive than their parents. It should be acknowledged, however, that the younger millennials—those bridging between the millennials and Generation Z (born after 2000)—are even more progressive in their ideas of gender and sexuality, and they often use new media such as Tumblr as sources of information regarding gender and sexuality (Tsjeng, 2016).

**Queerly Exploring This Project**
I argued in Chapter 2 that centering emotions is a subversive act that queers normative understandings of emotion (Cvetkovich, 2003). Here, I examine the generativity of queer theory in relation to this project and what I learned from the artists. Centering emotions is a queer act, as emotions have long been cast as peripheral (Fine, 1994; Hill Collins, 2000; Jaggar, 1989; Lorde, 1984). I set out in this project to examine the ways that these young adults articulate and experience their activism in light of the contemporary political climate. These artists articulated their activism as pockets of resistance to the moment. This was illustrated in their art and in our conversations.

This resistance manifested through pride in their identities. This is illustrated by the display of symbols of pride in the art by Angel_Rainbow_Daisy, Ladybug, Mothman, Radically Soft, and Sparkle Enby and in the visual poem by Mothman and Ladybug. All these pieces express pride in identities that have been targeted by the Trump administration, as I discussed in Chapter 1. However, by using queer theory, I dig beneath the surface to understand how we can produce knowledge that resistance local structures of domination (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012).

Leaning on the work of Stockton (2004) to explore the experiences of those who have found themselves resisting hegemonies, I explored how these artists articulate this resistance. Not all of the artists portrayed their resistance in the same manner, and some manifested neoliberal understandings of equality. Those who resisted the normativizing impact of the Trump regime largely showed love and support for one another, rather than anger toward or hate for the regime. Interestingly, part of the resistance was binding together their final art pieces, creating a collage of different resistances. This could be
seen as an act of solidarity—being bound together not only through the vines of kudzu and cakes, but through the community that formed during our time together.

While queer theory often is about the destabilizing of identity, these artists described identity as largely central to their own activism. Queer theorists’ goal of subverting the notion of stably constructed identities (Gamson, 2000; Hammers & Brown III, 2004) may seem at odds with this project. This may seem particularly true due to how these artists spoke to their experiences of resistance as centered largely on their identities. However, as I expressed in Chapter 2, being in search of resistances that exceed binary oppositions, such as oppressed and oppressor, while still accounting for an analysis of difference that accounts for these oppositions is central to a queer analysis (Britzman, 1995). Queer theorists understand the critical commitment that the world “is based on a struggle for power” (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 102). I align myself with other queer theorists who believe that this struggle for power is not limited to one aspect of identity, or to identity alone.

As a queer researcher who attempts to subvert binaries, I attend to the notion binaries are not solely bipolar oppositions (Fèlix Guattari & Stivale, 2009). Thus, I see these artists not just as their identities, but as fully agentic beings who use their identities as symbols to communicate and to build community. As Homogoblin expressed, she is privileged as a “White woman” but also experiences marginalization. Importantly, this marginalization is not limited to her queer sexuality, but her queer regionality of being southern. In the South, activism and progressive politics are seen as outside the norm.
That is all to say that queer theory is a productive lens through which to analyze and understand these artists’ experiences, but not as productive as listening first to artists’ own stories, to discovering the nuance that exists within their art and within their lives. I came to this project intending to use queer theory in some manner, foolishly defining the subjectivities of these artists as queer, as transgressive, as resisting regimes of the normal (Anzaldúa, 2010; Warner, 1993). Instead, I have learned that while these artists do resist, and do actively transgress against normativizing regimes, they are fully agentic beings who do not need a scholar to define for them who they are. What they need is what they ask for. To see them any other way is to fall into a trap of research that benefits the researcher, rather than to conduct research for liberatory purposes.

Social Media, Communication, and Community Building

Webb (2017), in her thesis, explored the ways that college-aged activists were bound together through social networks, identities, and resistance. I found through my project similar representations that reflected her analysis of the role social media played for activists. The artists in this project shared information with their networks about recruitment for the project, and they recruited at least four other artists (Sparkle Enby, Homogoblin, Ladybug, and Tēgan).

It was the building of online networks, according to Webb (2017), that aided young activists’ fight against oppression by helping them find support from other activists. Other researchers have documented similar findings—that cyberspace can be not only a productive avenue for building networks (Bailey, 2017; Carney, 2016), but also a place to learn and disseminate information (Gerbaudo, 2012; Idle & Nunns, 2011).
Specifically, Bailey (2017) argued that social media provides a space for marginalized communities to build networks and communicate with one another, acknowledging that these conversations have been “traditionally muffled from the mainstream, but” are “also logistically laborious due to the obstacles of white-controlled media” (p. 2). I found resonance with this sentiment through conversations with Leia, who thought it would be helpful to keep a curated list of social media figures who can help activists learn about important issues that might be kept out of mainstream White-controlled media.

In this project, Leia and CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 advocated for the use of social media platforms such as Twitter as productive spaces for learning about social movements and enriching their existing knowledge of human rights issues. New media platforms enabled these artists to stay engaged in what CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 described as a “busy” life. It allowed them to self-curate their learning, as evoked by Tsjeng (2016). Relatedly, representations of social media were present in their artwork as well. Leia and Angel_Rainbow_Daisy used text that referred to social media, and Claire directly evoked social media through her use of icons.

Makeda highlighted as well the harm perpetrated on social media. She stated that “social media is pretty injuring to other people.” CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 admitted that it can “be used for malignant purposes.” This was exemplified by the experience that Mothman spoke about. Mothman had reported racial slurs used by incoming SCPWI students in a group chat. While none of the artists spoke to what should be done about social media being used for malignant purposes, I argue that the self-curation of connections on these platforms can be used to create a community where you may be
shielded, in part, from malignant actors. I argue that it’s also important to have offline connections that may help ground you in the face of interactions with malignant strangers on the internet.

I think Mothman’s experience of reporting students expressing hate language and finding that little to nothing was done about it reflects an intolerance for student activism. The resurgence of intolerance is a manifestation of generational intolerance toward activism. Some of the very same individuals who critique millennial activists may be the youth of yesterday, who were activists of their era. Due to the rise of the 24-hour news cycle, with news updates being pushed through to our phones, we experienced news fatigue in a way that was not experienced prior to the rise of social media and smart phones. This rejection of new activism and the fatigue represent a protection of cisgender heterosexual masculine nativist and White supremacy within the academy, which has been well documented in literature (Ahmed, 2012; Delgado, 1984; Nicolazzo, 2016; Weiser & Wagner, 2017; Wilder, 2014) and White conservative leadership who have attacked youth activists, with a particular focus on student activists. The failure of leadership of educational administrators intersected here, as it often does, with the tentativeness of a cyberculture that is rife with hate language (D. Bromwich, 2017; B. Cooper, 2017; Mangan, 2018a, 2018b).

**Conclusion**

These findings represent the themes drawn from the various sources of data as presented in Chapter 3. These sources were (a) the communication between artists; (b) my communication with the artists; (c) the production of the zine (the decision-making
processes); and (d) art content. These findings represent significant connections to
literature. For instance, connections to community supports the work of Milkman (2017)
in the intersections of activist movements of the Old and New Left. These artists also
engaged with identity as a salient aspect of their activism, supporting the work of Rhoads
(2000). Moreover, the artists were tired, seemed like they might be on the road to
burnout, supporting the work of Rodgers (2010).

In Chapter 6, I present my conclusions and what I feel are the implications of this
study. I address activists, activist-scholars, and university administrators. In addition, I
address individuals who hope to gain a better understanding of the contemporary rise of
activism among millennials.
CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

I slammed my head against my desk. It had been a long year working for the multicultural center at SCPWI. I regularly questioned whether I should still be there. I’d been in this role almost four years—two years longer than most of my peers in similar positions. With just a month left until the end of the semester, I was excited for a summer break. My plans were to catch up on reading, attend some professional development opportunities, and plan for the start of my new program focused on social justice education for the campus community.

But on a Friday morning, I began getting flooded with e-mails and voicemails. A White woman student had Snapchatted a list of reasons why “[SCPWI] Wifi [sic] blows.” Her Snapchat included a racial slur among the items offered as evidence, which also included “incompetent professors,” “overpopulation,” and “parking.” On Tumblr, someone created a post identifying the student and saying that she went to SCPWI. The Tumblr response suggested everyone call SCPWI to place complaints about the student and about the fact that SCPWI would enroll someone who used racial slurs. The Tumblr post was shared more than 17,000 times. The phone number in the Tumblr post was the direct number to my desk. The unending ringing of the phone, my flooded e-mail inbox, and—most of all—this latest incident of racism perpetrated by a student were the reasons why, once again, I was slamming my head into my desk.
Ahmed (2012, 2017) described doing “diversity work” in institutions of higher education as banging your head against a brick wall. For the past decade working in student affairs, I have felt as if I have been slamming into brick wall after brick wall. Describing tensions in the implementation of diversity work, Ahmed noted that diversity work is “the work we do when we are attempting to transform an institution” and “the work we do when we do not quite inhabit the norms of an institution” (2017, p. 91). I have slammed my head against my desk more than once as I attempted to transform an institution where I do not quite fit. For Ahmed, the experience of doing diversity work “is the feeling of coming up against something that does not move; something solid and tangible” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 96). When I started my work as a diversity practitioner, I thought I had been “appointed by an institution to transform that institution.” What I experienced was the “institution as a wall, as the very thing that block[ed] my efforts” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 96).

This project is not only my addition to the larger body of literature regarding young adult activism, and regarding arts-based research (ABR), but also a product for use by the communities of which the artists, and other targeted students I have known for nearly a decade, are a part. My journey at SCPWI has been long and winding. I arrived in 2008 to do my master’s degree, and I left after finishing, only to return a year later to fill my former supervisor’s position in the multicultural office. When I interviewed for the job, people would ask why I wanted to come back to SCPWI, and I would confidently and truthfully answer that I felt my work was not done.
This project serves two purposes. First, it helps me close the loop and give back to the community of progressive activists that has fostered my growth for the past decade. This project serves to show that there was a community—is a community—that has worked and will continue to work after my departure to create a more radical, loving, and accepting university. Second, this project serves to challenge normative discourses, particularly those perpetuated by White cisgender heterosexual able-bodied individuals. While these identities are not monolithic, they and those who hold them represent the preponderance of power in contemporary U.S. culture. By challenging these normative discourses, this project aims to work toward more inclusive spaces, including at SCPWI.

In this final chapter, I discuss what I think are the significant findings of this study. I connect these findings to literature and theory, and I lay out what I think are the implications for the various communities that this project attempts to speak to. I address the shortcomings of this study and how, if I were to do it again, I might change the research design. Finally, I attempt to answer this project’s research questions and lay out what should happen next.

**Summary**

I used ABR in this project to explore the ways in which young adults experience and articulate the role of emotions in their activism. My intention was to do this through the collaborative creation of zines, a form of do-it-yourself (DIY) art rooted in feminism and punk rock (B. L.-A. Bell, 2002; Comstock, 2001; Duncombe, 2008). The final products are not what I had in mind when I thought of zines, but as zines eschew standardization or format, and instead rely on their content to define them, I embraced the
artists’ interpretation of zine based on the prompt in my introduction to the purpose of our meetings (see Appendix G for the text of my introduction). Much like queer theory as method, which is a scavenger method (Gamson, 2000; Murphy & Lugg, 2016), this final product reflected the interpretations, intentions, and aims of the artists themselves, and that is what is centrally important to me. While I chose not to delimit the format for zines, other researchers may have attempted to do so. Further, the majority of researchers who have looked at zines used them as a method and did not engage with them as points of data themselves (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004). They used zines as a tool to study the zinesters, rather than the content that the zinesters were creating.

Over the course of three meetings, the artists created over 20 pieces of art. Further, one artist, Leia, made a zine from a protest poster she had created for the March for Our Lives. The March for Our Lives event happened in March 2018, within weeks of our first meeting. The art created reflected the various backgrounds, experiences, and commitments that these artists claim. Thus, this project uses these many pieces of art to better understand these millennial activists. Through several rounds of coding, I established multiple themes that ran not only through the art, but also through the dialogues the artists had with each other and with me. The most present themes, which I addressed in Chapter 5, were (1) The Demands of Artistry; (2) Building Community; (3) Distance in Families of Birth; (4) Resistance to Oppression; (5) Emotion; (6) Mental Health, Self-Care, and Guilt; (7) The South; and (8) Social Media. As part of these overarching themes, many subthemes were present, as well as several salient points, such as (1) “Reactive Existence” to Oppression, (2) Southern Rejection, (3) Queer Love, (4) From the North, and (5) Unsafe Digital Spaces. I represented data at length in Chapter 5.
While I do not intend to proffer any generalizations in this chapter, I do think that this project is a snapshot of a particular group of activists within a particular community and can be used to better understand how they conceptualized their identities and their activism and articulated their ideas and arguments about what needs to change.

The incoming students to institutions of higher education are largely no longer millennials, but members of Generation Z—those born after 2000. While the border between millennials and Generation Z may not be hard and fast, I used Pew Research Center data to name millennials as individuals born between 1980 and 2000 (Fry, 2016). Most students currently enrolled in institutions of higher education are millennials, but they will soon be overtaken by a new generation. While the artists in this project represent a subpopulation that is engaged in progressive activism, the members of Gen Z are acknowledged to be more openly queer, more openly trans, and far more progressive than their millennial predecessors (Tsjeng, 2016). Generation Z is thought to be more ethical in its understanding of the world (J. Walter Thompson Intelligence, 2015). Though some argue that Generation Z may be conservative, others maintain that this generation is far more accepting of people who are different—this is inclusive of not only LGBT issues but racial issues as well (Loehr, 2017).

While I hope this project speaks to scholars of education, scholar-activists, university administrators, and student activists themselves, I contend that moving forward we must do more to support and work with some of our youngest adult activists. It is my belief that we are at a turning point, and millennials like these artists represent the vanguard of student activists. As I argued in Chapter 5, I see contemporary activist
movements as a continuation of the legacy of social justice movements stretching back to the 1930s. Milkman (2017) argued, and I agree, that millennial activism combines the traditions of the Old Left (Marxist cultural critique) and the New Left (centrality of identity) to create a newer left that acknowledges the interconnection of class as an aspect of identity and part of a holistic self.

**Implications**

In this chapter, I attempt to speak to four different communities. While I acknowledge that there is significant overlap between some of these communities, I believe that each community’s use of this information may be different, and so I address the four separately, while underscoring points that I believe represent overlapping interests. These four groups, whom I address in order, are scholars of education, scholar-activists, university administrators, and student activists.

**Scholars of Education**

In this project, I sought to better understand the experiences of millennial activists during the spring of 2018 through their artwork. I designed the project by centering the production of zines as representations of resistance. This project is part of a legacy of activist-engaged arts-based research ABR (Barone & Eisner, 2011). It also adds to the scholarship on higher education student activism (R. Cohen & Snyder, 2013; Rhoads, 2000; Wolf-Wendel, 2004). This project also challenges notions of objectivity and rationality, openly engaging in ideological and emotional work (Jaggar, 1989; Lather, 1986). I address each of these three points in the following sections, first exploring activist-engaged ABR.
**Activist-engaged ABR.**

Arts-based research is rife with possibility for engaging in activist-informed research. As Leavy (2017) argued, ABR is way to explore aspects of identity and subvert normative thinking, challenging ideologies that uphold oppressive hegemonies. Further, ABR resonates with an activist method, as it values nonhierarchical relationships (Gitlin, 2012; Kauffman, 2017; Leavy, 2017).

I engaged a community of artists in this project to collectively explore the ways they experienced and articulated emotions in their activism. I used the framework of ABR to accomplish this through artistic representation. Using the Four Guiding Principles of ABR developed by Cahnmann-Taylor (2017), I explore how this project may or may not meet the guidelines of ABR. The four principles were explored fully in Chapter 3. They are (a) The Principle of Subjectivity and Public Good, (b) The Principle of Attribution and Ethical Good, (c) The Principle of Impact and Aesthetic Good, and (d) The Principle of Translation to Scientific Good.

I think that this project meets all four criteria. The Principle of Subjectivity and Public Good states that art should disturb conventional politics of representation. This project accomplishes disruption not only through nontypical research methods like ABR, but also in the art itself, which I contend speaks from the margins, at times resisting hegemonies of oppression. Second, The Principle of Attribution and Ethical Good involves taking research seriously. I have conducted this research both seriously and responsibly, working with these artists to create a project that represents their experiences and that serves their needs as young adult artists, as well as mine as a doctoral candidate.
This has meant ensuring that the artists felt respected, and that my representation portrayed their stories realistically. It also involved member checking with the artists after the writing of Chapter 5.

The third principle is Cahnmann-Taylor (2017) and involves the way that scholarartists can create high-impact art. Generating impact involves spending time with the art, and with other art, and consulting with other artists. As this project was collaborative in its creation of art, the project meets this third criterion. This principle also involves the expansion of ABR as a field and the field’s tendency to experiment, to push its own boundaries. I believe that using ABR with millennial activists advances the field and experiments with how this method can be generative for understanding the articulations of activisms. This is the first time ABR has been used to explore the experiences of young adult activists through art creation. Further, Cahnmann-Taylor highlighted that this pushing of boundaries as a scholarartist means never fully feeling safe as a scholarartist—always looking for new ways to use old tools. I know that throughout this project I never felt safe. Both as a scholar and as an artist, I doubted my abilities and dealt with impostor syndrome (Langford & Clance, 1993). This was further compounded by engaging in a methodology that was new to me, learning as I progressed through the project.

The fourth and final principle is The Principle of Translation to Scientific Good, which is about pushing beyond aesthetics to ensure that research also is generative and fosters conversations. I believe that this project will elicit conversations about the
experiences of millennial activists and also about how other scholartists can use similar approaches and tools to work in community with young adult activists.

*Lessons for scholartists.*

Thus, I believe that this project not only meets the criteria for good ABR but also generates new lessons to take back to other scholartists. First, the lesson that placing limitations on the expression of art is just that: limiting. I envisioned using zines for this project, and in my experience, zines have a somewhat standard appearance. In this project, we focused on DIY and putting things together to create something new, using the aesthetics of zines but not the book style of zines. I believe that by not placing limitations of format on the artists, I fostered their creativity. This absence of limitations engaged with the notions of misperforming (Prendergast & Belliveau, 2017) and of eschewing failure (Halberstam, 2011).

Additionally, I believe that engaging with young adult activists from multiple commitments and backgrounds engendered a space to create collaborative art in a way that has not been accomplished in ABR previously. As I argued in Chapter 5, the demands of artistry helped bridge differences to create a community. For the most part, the artists didn’t know one another prior to this project, and they worked together to create art and community to speak back to hegemonic discourses. I found that ABR was generative of community with this group of people.

*Methodological lessons for ABR.*

Methodologically, ABR involves a notion of creativity. This is clear in its aesthetic origins and this creativity is also evident in ABR’s approach to research itself.
As I addressed previously, I opened space for failure (Halberstam, 2011) through the open and collaborative approach I took in introducing the project to the artists. I believe that this open approach accomplished two things. First, it allowed the artists to take some ownership and demonstrate what I noted as agency not only in their art, but also in the development of the project. I addressed this in Chapter 5, through the peer recruitment effort and Homogoblin’s remark that “we” accepted all levels of artistic talent. Second, this project, through the community it built, may have created relationships between progressive activists in the region where SCPWI is located that didn’t previously exist. This is an element of one of Cahnmann-Taylor’s (2017) guiding principles of ABR: engagement with other artists. This is also an area to explore in further conversations with these artists during the next phase of this project.

Further, zine creation has not previously been used as a way to explore the experiences of young adult activists. While zines have been studied for their role in developing literary skills and agency among young women (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004), this framing had not been previously represented in the literature. Therefore, as artists we engaged in a new type of ABR: the creation of collaborative art to better understand the experience and articulations of activism.

*Emotions in research.*

As I state throughout this project, we need to engage emotions. We need to center emotions and understand that they are a central driving force for many people. This was understood hundreds of years ago (Spinoza, 1992). Therefore, this project centered emotions in activism, to better understand what emotions were being elicited through
activism. My emotions were not the same emotions the artists had. We must “be willing
to hear what someone is saying, even when it violates your expectations or threatens our
interests” (Fine, 1994, p. 20). Knowledge “is understood as the product of a moment of
mutual construction that at once converges divergent perspectives and preserves the
divergence” (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 19). The goal is not to search for an all-encompassing
definition of knowledge but to respect the divergences that arise. As each artist spoke
from their own perspective and created art from that perspective, those perspectives are
maintained and respected within this project, even when I may not agree with them
(Haraway, 1988).

Linda Tuhwai Smith (2012) challenged us to pay attention to who owns, who is
served by, and who benefits from research. While this project does not pretend to be a
participatory action research project, I am informed by the work of decolonial and
participatory scholars (Kidd & Kral, 2005; Patel, 2015; Sandoval, 2000; L. T. Smith,
2012). These influences demand that I create knowledge that is liberatory, as defined by
the communities with which I work.

**Higher education student activism.**

I contend that the knowledge created through this project engenders new ways of
thinking about how to engage in activist-informed research (Chatterton, 2008; Hale,
2001) in order to understand spaces of activism generated by young adults on college
campuses. As I discussed previously in Chapters 2 and 5, activism has long been a part of
the landscape of higher education (Cohen & Snyder, 2013; Rhoads, 2000; Thelin, 2011;
Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Activism in higher education often reflects the marginalized
identities of individual activists. Rhoads (2000) saw that student activists in the 1990s were similar to their counterparts from the 1960s and 1970s who engaged in activism around their identities. Further, as I have also expressed, Milkman (2017) argued that millennial activists blend the Old Left and New Left. This was most evident in the work of Mothman and Ladybug. Moreover, students are using new media in ways that inform their activism. This is a space of learning, growth, and community building for these activists (Bailey, 2017; Gerbaudo, 2012; Muñoz & Culton, 2016). Therefore, those who work with young adult activists, and specifically activists in college, should engage and work with these young people in a manner that addresses their needs (for support and guidance) and commitments (identity and issue-based). Moreover, this project illustrated that the production of art can itself serve as a basis for community building among young adults. The creation of art can also break the monotony of an education system that is text-based, that disallows alternative methods for exploring knowledge. In my own experience teaching a seminar this past semester, rather than having students write text-based reflections, I had the students create zines that reflected their experiences with their internships. While there was some initial uncertainty, the students came to love the format and the creativity it allowed.

This project aims to add to a body of literature on young adult activism (Bailey, 2017; Hope, Keels, & Durkee, 2016; Rhoads, 2000), the use of social media in activism (Cabrera, E. Matias, & Montoya, 2017; Carney, 2016; Gerbaudo, 2012; Muñoz & Culton, 2016; Nadia Idle, 2011), and the impact of emotions on activism (Askins, 2009; Bosco, 2007; G. Brown & Pickerill, 2009; S. D. Brown & Stenner, 2001; Clough, 2012), and to the growing body of work on ABR and activism (B. L.-A. Bell, 2002; Comstock, 2001;
Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004). I have attempted to situate my research in conversation with these works, testing the boundaries and limitations of these fields where appropriate and applicable.

**Scholar-Activists**

I have been openly ideological and emotional throughout this work. It has deeply affected me in many ways. I lean on the understanding of a scholar-activist and negotiate the tensions of being both inside and outside a community through this project (Villenas, 1996). As I mentioned, my own positionality, as well as my role as a university leader, impacted this study.

Like Kotliar (2016) and Clough (2012), I was embedded with many of these millennial activists I refer to as “the artists” throughout this project. As a former student affairs professional who worked in the multicultural center of SCPWI for close to a decade, I know many activists on college campuses. I situate myself in this project as a practitioner/researcher. This came out in my project when some of the artists expressed their struggle to find support for their mental health needs, and my background with institutional structures aided me in helping connect them with the appropriate resources. Through this project I was inside the community and outside the community (Fine, 1994). I was invested in these artists, not for the purposes of the project but as a member of our community.

This work is a challenge to scholars who work with communities that are often the targets of well-intentioned scholars: We must understand that research has a long legacy of furthering the wounds of oppression (Call-Cummings & Martinez, 2016;
Denzin & Lincoln, 2012). Therefore, this project aims to inspire other scholars, scholar-activists, and practitioner-scholars who want our research to work toward a liberatory end, and who want to engage with the communities we hope to understand. What is it that the community needs? How can work be done with the community? Who decides what is ethically and equitable engagement with the community? Sometimes this means we should leave these communities alone and accept our failure as a generative step on our own scholarly path (Halberstam, 2011).

My bridging of an insider/outsider (Villenas, 1996) status had implications for this project. I believe it allowed young adult activists who knew me, or knew of me, to feel more comfortable with me. My work at SCPWI over the past several years illustrated my commitments to various communities, such as communities of Color and queer and trans communities. Moreover, I believe my support of students and student leaders in these communities helped eased my entry into a community others might not have been able to access as quickly. I believe this is why I was received warmly. I was not an outside researcher coming into the artists’ communities solely for the purpose of research; I had been a part of many activist communities in the area for several years.

That participation may also have had disadvantages. First, sometimes the artists spoke in vague descriptions, using language they assumed I would understand and references they assumed I would know, because I had been part of their community. This meant I had to infer meanings from their statements. Had I been an outsider, the artists might have elaborated more. Further, if I had not known what they were referring to, I might have asked them to elaborate. Instead, I relied on my insider knowledge of
situations. My lack of surprise at what was shared worked against nuanced representation of their work. I believe that scholar-activists who may bridge the binary of insider/outsider must ask follow-up questions to ensure that any representations are in the voices of those we are working with, rather than in our own words as we try to parse out references and allusions.

While 14 artists engaged with this project, the call for participants received close to 30 responses. Moreover, many of the artists brought friends with them to the art sessions, signaling that they felt this project would be a good use of their time. I do not believe they would have done this had I not been a figure in the local young adult activist community.

To that end, I argue that scholar-activists need to give more than we take. By this, I mean that scholar-activists need to be engaged in the community even when it is hard to be, and even when there is no scholarly reason to be there. Because I was engaged in the local activist community, even if these artists did not know me, often we had a mutual connection. I believe that it was my ongoing presence in activist communities over a number of years that allowed me to gather a group of millennial activists, from many communities and representing many forms of activism, together for this project.

I believe that scholar-activists need to engage with communities that experience oppression, so that, as I illustrated earlier, we are present when our skills are needed. The day when we are needed may never come, but scholar-activists must undo legacies of White saviordom and of attempting to come in as a vanguard when there is a problem in a community. There is certainly a risk of being charged as playing the “good white”
(Thompson, 2003), but, as a mentor once expressed in my presence, that is always a risk. Therefore, I believe that scholar-activists who hold privileged positions must acknowledge these positions, but not dwell in guilt, for that can never be productive (Lorde, 1984).

**University Administrators**

It is no secret that in the academy, openly ideological work is precarious work (Adsit et al., 2015). This is not just true for staff members. Steven Salaita famously was denied a faculty position due to posts on his personal Twitter account relating to the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict (Lubet, 2017). Further, at least one student affairs professional had a job offer rescinded because of tweets (Bauer-Wolf, 2017). How do student affairs professionals and other university administrators show support for students who engage in openly ideological political agendas that, if institutionally supported, may jeopardize university branding (Ahmed, 2012; Stripling, 2018) and/or state funding (Kimbler, 2018)?

Another institution in the southeast, the University of Tennessee, lost state funding for its Office of Diversity and Inclusion, which in turn decimated funding for the LGBT Resource Center (Adsit et al., 2015). After the institution secured private funding to help support the resource center, as well as a number of other progressive programs, such as a safe sex week, the university president was pushed out, a move many saw as conservative backlash to her support of progressive ideals (Stripling, 2018). Here, we see a number of ways that institutions support conservative ideologies (Adsit et al., 2015; Kimbler, 2018; Lubet, 2017; Stripling, 2018). Further, the support given to another
institution, George Mason University, by the Koch Foundation illustrates how conservative politics can influence the academy (Larimer, 2018) and potentially reify an effect of no support for marginalized students and students working for progressive politics. Money from the Koch Foundation helped George Mason University grow from a small commuter school to a major public university and a center of libertarian scholarship (Green & Saul, 2018). Additionally, these monies were not given to George Mason University; they created faculty positions for which Charles G. and David H. Koch sat on the selection committees (Green & Saul, 2018). I believe that state institutions, while not existing in a vacuum, should not accede too quickly to conservative political pressures. Instead, we need to ensure that progressive initiatives have alternative sources of funding, so that when a threat comes, there are ways of maintaining services for marginalized groups. Further, in cases like that of George Mason University, we need to not only ensure that monies given to institutions of higher education are transparent, but also encourage progressive donors to give to higher education.

These battles in a culture war, using economic support as a weapon, are being waged on college campuses by the political right. And they must be responded to. Often, this response needs to be undercover, as I illustrated by my own personal experiences of harassment due to my support of these students. Community spaces for higher education professionals who work for the inclusion of marginalized students need support. Like the artists illustrated in this project, these educators need a community to engage in fellowship with in order to form alliances and to build a network for activism to respond to hostile acts from the political right.
I think about the Unite the Right Rally that took place at the beginning of the 2017–2018 academic year in Charlottesville, near and on the campus of the University of Virginia, another institution in the southeast (Bertrand, 2017; Morlin, 2017). I wonder what our response would have been had this happened at SCPWI. The attacks on progressive students have not been limited to southern institutions—I think here about the letter to incoming students at the University of Chicago, saying that the university does not condone safe spaces or trigger warnings (Vivanco & Rhodes, 2016), or the controversy surrounding the policing of appropriate Halloween costumes at Yale University (Friedersdorf, 2015). But I pay specific attention here to institutions in the South because that is the context of SCPWI. If something like a Unite the Right rally happened at SCPWI, I think the university president might send out a letter or a tweet, but little other action would be taken.

I suggest that institutions that the take inclusion of historically underrepresented groups seriously and create plans to support them more robustly. The plan I suggest is threefold. First, put policies in place that prevent hateful rhetoric. While many of these speakers who are touring campuses tout their First Amendment right, recently one of these provocateurs, Richard Spencer, admitted on a podcast that they [he and other “alt right” speakers] aren’t pro–free speech (Holt, 2018). When hate-inciting speakers and provocateurs come to campus, we must cultivate student health and protect student safety on our campuses. Evidence from alt-right agendas reflect violence as an explicit strategy and murder and attempted murder at hate rallies in Virginia and Florida have provided evidence that alt-right groups present a clear and present danger. College campuses must be able to protect their students. They must be able to prevent hate-inciting events. In
cases where these events cannot be prevented, an alternative event should be created. This event should reflect not only the value of inclusion but the interests and passions of the students. This should engender greater participation from students than the alternative event could.

Second, institutions should not merely be reactive; they should have an ongoing commitment to inclusion and diversity. This could be made real by ensuring that key decision makers reflect the student body and also communicate and work with students on a regular basis. Student services offices at SCPWI, and at many other schools, operate on a standard eight-to-five schedule. Rarely did I see students using our services before noon. A flexible schedule would allow more educational administrators to be more student-centered in their approach. Working with students does not simply mean listening to students; it also means asking them what they need to create a space in which they feel a part of the community.

Finally, ongoing education for all members of the university community is paramount to inclusion. I illustrated a few moments of educator failure at SCPWI in Chapter 5, but I have seen many others. These range from tenured professors e-mailing me after attending a Safe Zone program to argue the similarity between gay marriage and marrying a goat, to a student services advisor expressing shock that my friend (a woman) would want to go to the Middle East, as they “put their goats in the front seats and their wives in the back!” I saw a serious lack of cultural competency in many of the faculty and staff at SCPWI, and through my involvement in digital spaces such as the Facebook group Student Affairs Professionals, which has over 30,000 members, I have witnessed
that this is endemic, not only present at SCPWI. Therefore, those who work in higher education must commit to ongoing engagement on issues regarding oppression. There must be ongoing dialogue that centers the experiences of the marginalized, in a sort of trickle-up social justice (Spade, 2015).

After the shooting of nine parishioners at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, activists from around the region protested the flying of the Confederate flag in front of the South Carolina State House. Bree Newsome, an activist from Charlotte, North Carolina, scaled the pole and took the flag down (Joiner, 2017). These activism helped convince the state legislature, the governor, and university presidents that it was finally the right time to remove this flag from the state house grounds. There was significant backlash from a number of groups in South Carolina. Colleges lost state funding for assigning a queer memoir as a first-year reading text (Driscoll, 2014); one college lost funding for its women and gender studies program because of the assigning of another LGBT-inclusive text (Wilson, 2014). The state legislature later went back on some of these decisions, with the understanding of a reallocation of $70,000 worth of funding to teach “the study and devotion to American institutions and ideals” (Zilliacus, 2014, p. np), such as the U.S. Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, or the Federalist Papers. Further, students can request alternate books if they object to the assignment of LGBT-inclusive texts.

Based on these past incidents, had an incident like what happened at the University of Virginia occurred at SCPWI, I believe the university would have reacted, rather than responded. The fact that the state legislature mandated additional funding to
support “American institutions and ideals” suggests that it considered LGBT-inclusive works un-American, and that the legislature aligns itself with White supremacist, masculine, nativist, heterosexual, and cisgender hegemonies. Anything else is seen as disruptive and un-American (Puar & Rai, 2002). Angela Davis stated at a lecture at the University of Southern California that she has a hard time accepting diversity as a synonym for justice. Diversity is a corporate strategy. It’s a strategy designed to ensure that the institution functions in the same way that it functioned before, except now that you now have some black faces and brown faces. It’s a difference that doesn’t make a difference. (Eckert, 2015)

Diversity has become a function of a neoliberal academy—diversity as management, rather than radical inclusion (Puar, 2007). Institutions need to rethink how we prioritize the people these walls were not originally built for. Instead of creating welcoming events (Ahmed, 2012) that reify our concept of who belongs, we need to systemically rethink how we create spaces for the communities that have long not been included. This means ensuring that individuals who have the interests of these communities at heart are in charge of rethinking our academy.

Spaces where student affairs professionals talk are filled with questions about these issues, as well as conversations on how to deal with students from historically marginalized backgrounds. I contend that those who work as university administrators would be well served by a greater understanding of how to work in community, in solidarity, and with these communities.
Just as in research, there is always the possibility of harm. As one artist, Radically Soft, illustrated in their art piece, “Know better. Do Better.” The often-cited quotation from Maya Angelou reads in its entirety, “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.” As university administrators, too often we are complicit in a system that was built through chattel slavery and still profits from this history (Wilder, 2014). At SCPWI it was student activists who forced officials in higher administration to acknowledge the history of slavery at the university, a point from the #2020Vision I referenced in Chapter 1.

As I started this chapter by acknowledging the many young activists I have worked with over the years, I also acknowledge the university administrators who have supported, loved, and affirmed these visionaries. It is upon the backs of the disaffected that liberation often comes (Weiser & Wagner, 2017). I have also been complicit in the shutting down and silencing of activisms, as have all other administrators. When our employment hinges on the precarity between ideology and obedience, we often accede to the later. This is perhaps truer for younger professionals, who may not have the cushion of tenure or senior status that could allow them to challenge the systems of White cisgender heterosexual masculine ableist supremacy that maintain contemporary higher education.

Moten and Harney (2004) argued that the university is always in search of a way to rid itself of the laborer—to be self-replicative. That labor force could begin to understand itself as dangerous to the development of capitalism, and thus to the institution itself (Moten & Harney, 2004). Those who subvert the status quo of an
institution are said to be “unprofessional. This is not an arbitrary charge. It is the charge against the more than professional” (Moten & Harney, 2004, p. 104). Like the many unnamed or forgotten activists who have been called unprofessional, those who “problematize the university” and “force the university to consider them a problem, a danger” (Moten & Harney, 2004, p. 105), we must be willing to engage and be part of the precariat.

Commitment to activism is complicated. As I have argued previously, we are all complicit at particular times and in particular spaces. Homogoblin talked about why she chooses to not engage in outward-focused activism and instead focuses on survival. Capitalism causes real strife for individuals who might want to engage with activism but must rely on the finances of an economic system supported by conservatives and neoliberals alike—politicians on the right and left who would punish socialist agendas. Activism is a risk for young adults, as it is for university administrators and faculty members. Being out as an activist is a choice, and one that must be considered seriously. Those who have traditionally received the privileges associated with particular identities (White, masculine, cisgender, able-bodied, heterosexual, upper-class) should be willing to become part of the precariat. Even when this is scary, and when we might risk it all, if we are serious about standing in solidarity we must not shy away from marching in solidarity, even when the institution demands that we stand back. As Audre Lorde wrote, “When we speak we are afraid our words will not be heard nor welcomed but when we are silent we are still afraid. So it is better to speak remembering we were never meant to survive” (Lorde, 1995).
Student Activists

Sentiments for Student Activists Resisting

This project is largely dedicated to your beauty. Despite overwhelming odds, you continue to care about making the world a better place. With our ever-changing world in organizing, draw on this work with a critical eye, situating it for what it is and where it comes from. Know that the climate of the space you hope to work in is going to be different than the one described in this project. The needs of your community will be different. So while there are salient points in this project, I have never intended it to be a road map. Rather, it is a marker of a group of millennial artist-activists finding themselves and each other.

For me, this project is one of hope. Hope that activists will find one another and build and create communities and solidarities, that activists will transgress barriers to creating inclusive communities and overcome obstacles that are placed in your way as you try to create community with one another. My hope is, was, and always will be that these groups coalesce to perform the role of what Ahmed (2017) calls the killjoy. The institutional killjoy is a figure who will not allow oppressive behavior to continue; who kills the joy of hegemonic power in practice, policy, and discourse; and who demands the creation of a radical space that is inclusive of all those who were not in mind when White institutions of higher education were made. That is the kind of community I wanted to help build through this project.

Based on the findings of this project, several recommendations can be derived. First, through conversations with these artists, I found that meaningful self-care is
important to longevity as an activist. Ladybug spoke about guilt being a driving factor for getting involved in activism. He postulated that this was largely a selfish motivation, and that activism done to rid oneself of guilt was not sustainable. Leia spoke about the existential exhaustion of something she named a “reactive existence,” derived from existing as a “troublesome” figure, not unlike Ahmed’s (2017) killjoy. Rodgers (2010) argued that relying on emotion alone as a driving factor for activism is a recipe for burnout and exhaustion. Living in this liminal space is not healthy in the long-term. Therefore, I believe that self-care is critical for anyone who wishes to continually engage in activism. The work is draining and, as the artists demonstrated, exhaustion is a real effect of activism. Further, Rodgers (2010) illustrated that emotion alone cannot sustain activism. Thus, activists must build routines of self-care. If you are too exhausted to meet your own needs, you cannot possibly be of use to a movement or to others. These activists were drawn to community. As D.Prince shared, his work was derived from his interconnectivity with others. Second, find a community with which to work and engage. If one doesn’t exist, create one.

This project serves as a guide to understanding a community of young adult activists at SCPWI who have expressed frustration with the failure of educators to stand up for justice. This was manifested through their artwork describing their resistance not only to the Trump regime, but to the hegemonies of SCPWI. As Foucault argued, “Where there is power there is resistance” (1978, p. 95). This also means that there is no absolute outside power. Therefore, we are all also complicit in oppression. These artists were part of a system that privileges a particular formation of knowledge, and the artists benefited from a legacy of chattel slavery (Wilder, 2014). Moreover, colleges are complicit in
unfair wage labor, as referenced by Mothman and Ladybug in their art; they spoke of their desire for SCPWI to divest in unfair labor practices. We can resist these deployments of power. This was illustrated by the artwork these artists produced that spoke against the power of the institution they existed within. I think of Leia’s work that reimagined the welcome message she got when enrolling, and how all these pieces of art rejected the messaging of the university. These works of art are a resistance to these hegemonies. Ruptures in relations of force, and ruptures in normative discourses, are always possible.

Third, I want young adult activists to realize that change is hard, but possible. Just as there is no outside of power, where there is power, there is resistance. Further, their resistance is not unnoticed, and they are not alone. Critical race theorists teach us that there are racial realists and racial idealists. The realists believe that racism is permanent. Racial realism is defined by “both the recognition of the futility of action – where action is more civil rights strategies destined to fail – and the unalterable conviction that something must be done, that action must be taken” (D. Bell, 1993, p. 199). The idealists believe that progress can be made (Ladson-Billings, 1998). These positions can be useful to help young adult activists understand those who may not believe that racism may be eradicated, as well as those who hold out hope for a more inclusive future.

From these artists, I learned a great deal about the realities of activism and their lives. As I mentioned previously, they are tired, and they are frustrated with educators they feel don’t support their voices. Moreover, they are willing to forge alliances and share of themselves with others when a space has been created for them to do so. Perhaps
most important, the regional context played a large role in their activism. Being activists in the South, whether from the South or not, had very real consequences for how they enacted and articulated their activism. This was prevalent in nearly all of their art but also in their conversations with one another and with me.

Questions Answered?

The overarching research question for this project was “How do young adults experience and articulate the role of emotions in the activism in which they engage?” Overarchingly the answer was a pride of identity. As discussed in Chapter 5, these artists expressed their activisms as pockets of resistance to the Trump administration, and to the failures of educators to support their educational journeys at SCPWI. They shared empathy through their art, sometimes through a humorous display, such as in Leia’s use of a meme (Figure 5.8) expressing frustration with those who didn’t show empathy in the way she thought it should be shown.

While some emotions were evoked, such as guilt, shame, and frustration, these were not the dominant emotions shared verbally or even nonverbally, in my observation. Further, while some of these emotions were evoked through the art, emotions were often used in the context of moving beyond them, such as in Homogoblin’s work (Figure 5.18). Homogoblin chose to illustrate herself standing on negative thoughts she had about her family, while simultaneously showing herself standing hand in hand with those same family members. Where emotions of hate were shown, such as in the work of Makeda (Figure 5.20), they were shown as being secondary to the love and empathy of community—they were at war with love, but evoked through the conversations as losing to love and empathy.
Moreover, through this project, I incidentally found evidence that communication is impacted by social media, and that activism is impacted by social media and the relationships these artists have with others. The South had a huge impact on situating these artists, as all of them stated that the context of the South dominated their activism. Many of these artists expressed, either through their art or through dialogue, tensions with their family. Many of them come from conservative backgrounds, and their progressive or liberal stances on issues produced friction with family members. This surely has an impact on the activisms of these millennials.

**Limitations and Opportunities to Improve the Project**

This project centered on understanding how some millennial activists articulated their activisms in the contemporary political climate. Starting with an understanding of the political climate in Chapter 1, then moving to understanding the literature surrounding activism and emotions in Chapter 2, this project offers a snapshot of a small subset of millennial activists affiliated with SCPWI. The method of this project was ABR. As evidenced by theme one in Chapter 5, this method had advantages in building community, but it also had weaknesses.

When I spoke with potential participants about getting involved with this project, many would decline because they did not see themselves as artists. I wonder how many might have gotten involved in this project and the community had the method been different or had they not known that creating art was part of the project. This is reflected in Theme 1 of Chapter 5, in which even the artists who chose to engage in this project expressed awkwardness with the creation of art.
Longer engagement in the creation of the art would have benefited the study, as might have individual or smaller group interviews between each meeting. The sample size of this project was developed to model inclusion, and thus anyone who expressed interest in the project was invited to join. A desire to include millennials and artists from many backgrounds helped create this community of artists.

I placed a purposeful delimitation on the inclusion of politically conservative students or those who were supporters of Donald Trump. This was in order to create a space where progressive and liberal millennial activists felt comfortable creating and sharing their opinions, feelings, and emotions without fear of engaging with someone who might fundamentally disagree with them. While this was a purposeful choice on my part, having politically conservative millennial activists present certainly might have engendered a rich conversation and experience.

This project intended to create collaborative work that involved many artists coming together. Finding time for busy people to come together was a challenge. Further, many of these artists were current students at SCPWI, and the timing was near the end of the semester, when students are often busy with final papers and exams. If I were to replicate this project, I would move the meeting times earlier in the semester. Moreover, I might consider engaging with a preestablished group that had steady meeting times, to achieve more consistency in attendance.

In a next iteration of this study, I also want to further explore if the artists experience an emotional/rational dyad (a concept I discussed extensively in Chapter Two). I believe individual conversations might help to excavate this possibility. I want to
examine how they navigate emotions, and if they see emotions as devalued by normative messaging in the contemporary political moment.

**Future Research**

Having no budget to conduct this research limited the scope of the project, not only in time but also in scale and location. I did have willing artists who were not local, and if I had had funds, I could have engaged at least three different geographic communities in this project. In the future, involvement from more individuals or people from multiple sites would add to a broader understanding of the experience under study. Further, the engagement of politically conservative students in a similar project is part of my next step for this research.

As I referenced earlier in my description of this project’s limitations, I placed a delimitation on engaging politically conservative students. As I move on in my career, I would like to engage in a similar project, using a multistage model. This would be a replication of the current study, with any limitations and weaknesses addressed to the best of my ability. I would replicate my study with a similar population of young adult progressive activists. I would also complete a similar project with a group of conservative young adults. It would be interesting to have a conversation between these two communities. Song (2017) suggested that political persuasions influence the media preferences of individuals. While CatsAreBetterThanDogs420 did show a predilection to critique both right-leaning (Fox News and Trump) and left-leaning (CNN) information sources, it would be productive to see how different communities describe their engagement with the contemporary political climate through art.
Moreover, because the South was a significant theme in this project, moving to a different region could also expand the scope of the project. I have been embedded in the context and community that this project portrays for nearly a decade. In a different context, how will my lack of roots—to pull on the kudzu metaphor—have an impact on the project? As I stated earlier, my insider positionality had a significant impact on my ability to recruit and to engender a space where artists felt comfortable critiquing SCPWI. As a scholar-activist, I must join a new community wherever I may end up after this before attempting any study that might hope to replicate this project. While I don’t believe it will take me another 10 years to become part of a community, it will take time. Taking the brilliance of Nel Noddings to heart, I understand that “time spent on building a relation of care and trust is not time wasted” (2012, p. 774).

**Is it Useful?**

As such, I believe that this project has been generative and useful on a number of fronts. First, it challenged me to venture into a new formation of research, namely art-based research. Further, it was the most in-depth research project I have undertaken to date. Therefore, this project was useful to me in my own educational and research trajectory. It also served as the culmination of my degree program. More importantly, I believe that this project is useful for the various communities that I intended to speak to, specifically scholars of education, university administrators, and student activists.

First, to scholars of education, I have produced a project that may serve as a framework for future research that uses zines as both data and methodology. Specifically, I have documented a project that centered the voices of millennial activists. Not only is this project a methodological contribution to the field of educational research, but it is
also a substantive contribution to the literature on young adult activism, and to art-based research. I did not have a scaffold from which to start this project, instead I built what I could with what I had. Therefore, it is my hope, that further scholars can use my work as that scaffold.

For university administrators, I laid out plainly various ways to support student activists but also ways in which to engage their inner killjoys (Ahmed, 2017). While I acknowledge that these methods of supporting student activists and engaging their killjoys worked for me at SCPWI and that the methods I used may not work at other institutions, I believe it may be informative to work done in other spaces.

Finally, for the artists of this project specifically, I believe that this experience may have been useful. I reflect back on the times we had together and think of the ways that many artists in the group provided support to one another. I think of collaborative moments in the creation of art for resistance, sharing mental health resources with an artist when she expressed that she needed this, the careful listening I witnessed when artists shared with one another, and of new friendships that were established through our coming together.

While it is not ultimately for me to say if this project can be of use to others, I do believe that it may be. Only through engaging with the artists in follow-up conversations may I ultimately know how this experience impacted their engagement in art, activism, and community.

**Ending Thoughts**

The final chapter of this study presented a summary of the project, as well as implications for four different communities I have attempted to speak to. I addressed the
limitations of this project and attempted to answer the project’s guiding question. I have also spoken to what I intend to do once this project has finished. In conclusion, I have attempted to better understand the experiences of millennial activists through art in the waning years of millennials being of typical college age. From here on out, the community of typical undergraduate students will be born after 2000, the upper end of the millennial age range. Therefore, this project presents a snapshot of millennials as their successors, Generation Z, begin to overtake them in higher education.

I’ve briefly mentioned how Generation Z may prove to be far more progressive politically than millennials, and more open to those who are different from them (Laughlin, 2016; Sicardi, McCharen, Laughlin, & Ford, 2016; Tsjeng, 2016). We have very recently seen some from Generation Z take center stage in the organization of the March for Our Lives rally that took place in Washington, DC, and around the world, with over 800 demonstrations (Carlsen & Patel, 2018). The snapshot captured by this study serves as a historical marker to understand this moment and this community. Its time is drawing near an end, and institutions of higher education must adapt to a new community of young adults who are already here.


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Feeling about the contemporary political moment?

Join our Research!

ARTS OF RESISTANCE RESEARCH
Get involved here | bit.ly/gwdls

Figure A.1 – Recruitment Flyer
Table A.1 Recruitment Dissemination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where</th>
<th>How</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feminist Student Org</td>
<td>In Person</td>
<td>1/31/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx Student Organization</td>
<td>In Person</td>
<td>1/31/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural Peer Educators</td>
<td>Facebook Group</td>
<td>1/31/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice Education Program</td>
<td>Facebook Group</td>
<td>1/31/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriett Hancock Center</td>
<td>Facebook Group</td>
<td>1/31/18</td>
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<td>Feminist Student Org</td>
<td>Facebook Group</td>
<td>1/31/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans United of South Carolina</td>
<td>Facebook Group</td>
<td>1/31/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-institute Diversity Leaders</td>
<td>Facebook Group</td>
<td>1/31/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students for Change</td>
<td>Facebook Group</td>
<td>1/31/18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trans Student Organization</td>
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<td>1/31/18</td>
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<tr>
<td>SC Progressive Network</td>
<td>Facebook Group</td>
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<td>Latinx Student Organization</td>
<td>GroupMe</td>
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<td>Event Description</td>
<td>Contact Method</td>
<td>Date(s)</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Profile</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>1/31/18, 2/4/18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women’s Studies Course</td>
<td>In Person, Guest Lecture</td>
<td>2/6/18</td>
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<td>Women and Gender Studies Listserv</td>
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<td>3/19/18</td>
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<td>(Undergraduate)</td>
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<td>Women and Gender Studies Listserv</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>3/19/18</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Graduate)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American Studies Listserv</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>3/19/18</td>
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## APPENDIX B – ARTIST REPORTED DEMOGRAPHICS

Table B.1 Artist Reported Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Demographics as Shared</th>
<th>Pronouns</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angel_Rainbow_Daisy</td>
<td>Latinx, Woman, Immigrant</td>
<td>She/Her/Hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CatsAreBetterThanDogs420</td>
<td>Queer, Trans, White</td>
<td>He/Him/His and They/Them/Their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Queer, Woman, Low Income</td>
<td>She/Her/Hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.Prince</td>
<td>African American Male Straight</td>
<td>He/Him/His</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homogoblin</td>
<td>Lesbian White Woman</td>
<td>She/Her/Hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladybug</td>
<td>White Male</td>
<td>He/Him/His</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leia</td>
<td>White Woman</td>
<td>She/Her/Hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makeda</td>
<td>Queer African American Woman</td>
<td>She/Her/Hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>He/Him/His</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothman</td>
<td>Queer, Genderqueer, Demigirl, White</td>
<td>They/Them/Theirs or She/Her/Hers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Radically Soft</td>
<td>Queer, Trans, Jewish, Nonbinary, Neurodivergent</td>
<td>They/Them/Theirs or Ze/Hir/Hirs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky Blue Banana</td>
<td>African, Jewish</td>
<td>She/Her/Hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sparkle Enby</td>
<td>Queer, Trans, Disabled, White</td>
<td>They/Them/Theirs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tēgan</td>
<td>Woman, White</td>
<td>She/Her/Hers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C - TRUMP COMMENTS

Below, find a collection of some of the statements that Trump has made from the time he announced his candidacy for President of the United States until June of 2018. The statement will be presented with a citation, and at what event the statement was said.

“When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you. They’re not sending you. They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people,” (Gass, 2015) - At his announcement for candidacy

“I just want to thank you because you’re very, very special people. You were here long before any of us were here, although we have a representative in Congress who, they say, was here a long time ago. They call her ‘Pocahontas.’ But you know what, I like you because you are special. You are special people.” (Silva, 2018). – to a group of Navajo Code Talkers

“Well, you know, when it comes to racism and racists, I am the least racist person there is. And I think most people that know me would tell you that. I am the least racist, I’ve had great relationships,” Trump said. “In fact, Randall Pinkett won, on the as you know, on ‘The Apprentice’ a little while ago, a couple of years ago. And Randall’s been
outstanding in every way. So, I mean, I am the least racist person.” (Gass, 2015) - On Fox and Friends

Referring to Haitians – “they all have AIDS” (Shear, 2017). – a meeting with domestic policy advisers

Trump said that federal judge Gonzalo Curiel couldn’t hear the Trump University case fairly because he’s Mexican. “We’re building a wall between here and Mexico. The answer is, He is giving us very unfair rulings—rulings that people can’t even believe” (Silva, 2018). A CNN interview

“I’m a negotiator like you folks,” “Is there anyone in this room who doesn’t negotiate deals?” “Probably more than any room I’ve ever spoken.” (Stokols, 2015). To the Republican Jewish Committee

“Why do we want all these people from 'shithole countries' coming here?” (Watkins and Phillip, 2018). – Oval Office meeting with lawmakers

"She gets out and she starts asking me all sorts of ridiculous questions," Trump said in a CNN interview. "You could see there was blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her wherever. In my opinion, she was off base.” (Rucker, 2015). – A Republican primary debate
APPENDIX D - LEIA PROTEST ZINE

Figure G.1 Leia Protest Zine – Cover

Figure G.2 Leia Protest Zine - Page 1 & 2
And that's why this weekend, at the MARCH FOR OUR LIVES, it was really beautiful to hear from the young people, tired already from their fears of going to school.

United

With the Elders of the protest movement.

Like Rep. John Lewis, a civil rights icon who has spent his whole life on the front lines of the right side of History.

As the "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Position Paper on Vietnam," from 1966 once said...

"... The United States Government has never guaranteed the freedom of oppressed citizens and is not yet truly determined to end the rule of terror and oppression within its own borders."

It doesn’t seem as if much has changed.

As Emma Gonzalez said in her speech this weekend, "Fight for your life before it’s somebody else's job."

Figure G.3 Leia Protest Zine - Page 3 & 4

Figure G.4 Leia Protest Zine - Page 4
Figure G.5 Leia Protest Zine – Back Cover

Figure G.6 Leia Protest Poster
### APPENDIX E – TABLE OF THEMES

Table E.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The Demands of Artistry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Building Community</td>
<td>2a. Vulnerability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2b. Peer-to-Peer Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2c. Interconnectivity and Metaphor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2d. Quilting Together Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Distance in Families of Birth</td>
<td>3a. Queer Identity and Strain in Conservative Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3b. Sibling Distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3c. Political Strain—Battling Conservative Ideologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Resistance to Oppression</td>
<td>4a. Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4b. Political Resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Emotion</td>
<td>5a. Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5b. Giving Up and Isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5c. Empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Mental Health, Self-Care, and Guilt</td>
<td>6a. Self-Care and Resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The South</td>
<td>7a. From the South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7b. SCPWI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Social Media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8a. Fake News and Information Literacy in An Age of Activism</td>
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APPENDIX F - INFORMED CONSENT COVER
INFORMED CONSENT COVER LETTER

University of South Carolina
Informed Consent Letter
Queer Resistance: An Arts-Based Research Understanding of Emotions and Activism

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigators
This research is being completed as a component of my doctoral studies in the Foundations of Education & Inquiry program at the University of South Carolina under the advisement of Dr. Allison Anders, Assistant Professor of Education in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of South Carolina.

Purpose of the Research
This project aims to create a better understanding of the ways in which college-aged activists navigate the contemporary political landscape with an eye toward emotions. This study hopes to better understand these issues to help educators and activists alike, be better prepared to engage and assist our students through these times.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will work collaboratively with Gavin and any other co-researchers on developing artistic representations of your experiences with activism in the contemporary political moment.

Potential Risks or Discomforts
We will engage in conversations regarding emotions and activism that may be triggering based on where the conversation heads. If at any time you wish to withdraw from the study, you are free to do so.

Potential Benefits of the Research
There are no personal benefits to the subjects. This study intents to better inform educators, activists, and advocates about the experience of students in an effort to better prepare individuals to be more cognizant of the impact of emotions and activism on young adults.

**Confidentiality and Data Storage**
All names will be changed if you desire them to be changed and data will be stored in a Dropbox account. Only the principal investigator and my advisor will have access to the raw data. You will have access to your data should you want it.

**Data Analysis and Follow-up**
You’ll be asked to engage in ensuring that any analysis that comes from our work together is accurately depicted. Further, you will have an opportunity to engage in coding and analysis of the data.

**Participation and Withdrawal**
Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or stop participation at any time without penalty. To stop simply state that you no longer wish to participate in this study.

**Questions about the Research**
If you have any questions about the research, you may the principal investigator Gavin Weiser at weiser@sc.edu, hir advisor Dr. Allison Anders at aanders@mailbos.sc.edu or University of South Carolina’s Office of Research Compliance (803) 777-7095.

This research project has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of South Carolina.

I have read the information provided above. I understand that by agreeing to be interviewed, I am agreeing to participate in this research study.

**KEEP THIS INFORMED CONSENT COVER LETTER FOR YOUR RECORDS.**
APPENDIX G - INFORMED CONSENT LANGUAGE

Welcome everyone, I am glad that you are here. Thank you for being interested and willing in participating in this project. My name is Gavin Weiser and I use ze/hir/hirs pronouns. I am a doctoral candidate in the Foundations of Education and Inquiry program at the University of South Carolina. As part of my degree program, I am completing a dissertation exploring the experiences of young adult millennials (18-36 as per the US Census) related to activism and resistance in light of the contemporary political climate.

As part of this project, I have a deep commitment to creating and maintaining as safe as a space as possible. To that end, if at any point you wish to no longer participate, please feel free to leave, and if you need anything please let me know.

Moreover, caucus spaces are very real and very important. A caucus space is an identity alike space that is often useful in having a conversation regarding privilege and oppression. If we as a group think that this might be something we want to do, we will make this happen. Again, I thank you very much for your involvement and I look forward to learning with you. Before we go any further, I want to go over the Informed Consent Letter with you all, and then I’ll open it up to any questions you may have.

Informed Consent Read

What questions can I answer for you?

Zine Prompt

This project involves the creation of art in reaction to the contemporary political climate. The art involved is in the formation of what are known as zines, short, hand-made, magazines that reflect the creators experience, or whatever the creator or creators want them to reflect. To that end, I’ve brought a number of different materials for which you can use to begin the creation of these zines, following the prompt of "How do you experience and articulate the activism in which you engage

Status: Exempt
APPENDIX H - PIGGY PARK

After the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, an African American woman was refused service at a restaurant in South Carolina called Piggy Park. This chain of restaurants was owned by Maurice Bessinger. The chain of restaurants is prominent today in South Carolina and is known as Maurice’s Piggie Park BBQ. Bessinger believed that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 “contravened the will of God” and thus violated his freedom of religion (Shahin, 2016). The woman, Anne P. Newman filed a class-action lawsuit, Newman v. Piggie Park Enterprises. Parts of this case were argued up to the Supreme Court of the United States. This case helped to establish that religious views do not trump civil rights. Further, the Supreme Court decision stated that “successful plaintiffs were routinely forced to bear their own attorney’s fees, few aggrieved parties would be in a position to advance the public interest”, and as such moving forward, lawyers who win civil rights cases are entitled to have their fees paid by the loser. This case may have an impact on the contemporary Masterpiece Cakeshop, Ltd. v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission as the defendant is relying on freedom of religion as a means to discriminate against making a cake for a wedding for two men.