Young Women’s Gendered Subjectivity and Agency in Social Movement Activism

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by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the experiences of young women participating in anarchist and environmental activism within the UK as a means of exploring the relationship between youth, gender, and political participation in a postfeminist, neoliberal context. Recent scholarship has identified young women as the ideal subjects of neoliberalism, where flexibility and reflexivity are prized and rewarded. Young women have been presented with new subject positions and forms of citizenship engagement but these are, for the most part, individualised and depoliticised. Concurrently theorists have warned of an impending crisis of democracy precipitated by youth political disengagement, while governments have condemned ‘incorrect’ or ‘disruptive’ forms of youth civic engagement. This thesis intervenes in these debates by exploring the significance of social movement participation for young women in contributing to their political agency and gendered subjectivity.

The research utilised a qualitative feminist methodology, analysing data from 20 semi-structured interviews, three diaries completed by interview participants, and 200 hours of participant observation. The thesis finds little evidence that young activist women are individualised or disengaged. Instead, their participation in collective action and their identification as feminists contribute to my theorisation of them as ‘wilful women’, whose conscious, reflexive political engagement marks them apart from individualised neoliberal subjects. Through a relational, feminist political agency they are able to reframe femininity as active and compassionate rather than passive and compliant, and engage politically on this basis. The study also finds that the non-hierarchical organisational structures of activist organisations effectively contribute to the creation of anti-oppressive pedagogic strategies for confronting inequality within activist cultures. This thesis makes an original contribution by developing a set of theoretical concepts that enable an understanding of the means by which young activist women construct dissident, wilful gendered subjectivities that confront sexism and inequality both within their own activist communities and within society at large.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

In an increasingly turbulent landscape of politics marked by austerity and globalisation, protest is undergoing something of a renaissance. While social movements have long presented an alternative, oppositional view of mainstream politics, the global impact of the 2007 financial crisis, and the ever-present political instability in the Middle East came together to produce some of the largest spectacles of populist political opposition that recent history has seen. Grassroots revolutions were growing up across the world; simultaneously local and global in a connected age of social media. From the Arab Spring to the Occupy movement, by way of student protests in countries across the globe, including Chile, Mexico, China, Spain, Turkey and the UK, protests have been sparked worldwide, and as soon as one is seemingly extinguished or abandoned another appears. Significantly, young people have been particularly visible within these movements – more so than any protests since the 1960s student movement that mobilised around campus-based opposition to the Vietnam War (Mason 2012). Juris and Pleyers (2009) have conceived of the cultures of political participation emerging amongst young people as representing an alternative mode of subcultural practice that values collaboration and cultural expression in its political commitment. Rejecting traditional modes of engaging in formal politics, these young people are instead drawn to horizontal, networked organisations that utilise direct action and new media technologies to create new political spaces (Juris and Pleyers 2009). As Paul Mason details in his coverage of recent global social unrest, “for many, politics has become gestural: it is about refusing to engage with power on power’s own terms; about action, not ideas; about the symbolic control of territory to create islands of utopia” (Mason 2012:3).

This historical moment of contention, though, has occurred at a time when concerns about youth political engagement in the West see young people branded as harbingers of a crisis of democracy as a result of their apathy and alienation. By all traditional measures of political engagement – voter turn-out, political interest, political knowledge, party membership, etc – the young are considered to be the most
disengaged (Furlong and Cartmel 2007). Yet in the UK two of the biggest spectacles of youth resistance in recent history came in the aftermath of the Coalition government’s formation in 2010. The decision to treble university tuition fees to £9,000 a year provoked a series of student protests through 2010 and 2011. Later in 2011, in the heat of summer, the shooting of an unarmed black man, Mark Duggan, by police in London provoked riots that spread across London and out to cities including Manchester, Nottingham, Bristol and Birmingham. Suddenly the contempt that young people held for the established political institutions was more visible than ever, but it drew condemnation from those in power because it represented the ‘wrong’ form of participation.

These competing discourses – of young people’s alienation on the one hand and problematic engagement on the other – have largely failed to interrogate the relevance of young women’s experiences within this moment. Studies of youth have a long history of ‘gender neutrality’ which for the most part has manifested as a concern primarily for the actions and interests of young men, visible, not least, in the predominance of studies of young men’s subcultural activities in public spaces (McRobbie 1980). Yet in recent decades inroads have been made to study young women’s experiences and to apply a gender lens to the phenomena of youth. In doing so, the field of ‘girl studies’ has emerged to address the specific situated nature of young women at a time of increasing flexibilisation and individualisation, enabling an understanding of the significance currently placed on young women as the ‘ideal subjects of neoliberalism’ (Nayak and Kehily 2008:52). The iconic image of the student protests of 24th November 2010 is of a group of girls in school uniform holding hands to form a cordon around a vandalised police van. In their youthful femininity they embodied “the promise and the failure of the modern” that Driscoll (2002:203) has identified as characterising the current status of young women more generally. The ideological assumptions and prejudices of those observing were read into their actions, including the Daily Mail who juxtaposed the school girls with other female protesters under headlines of “Rage of the girl rioters: Britain’s students take to the streets again - and this time women are leading the charge” (Camber et al 2010) and “Young, bright and pretty: The day girl students went to war over tuition fees” (Harris 2010). Meanwhile, Jonathan Jones, writing in the Guardian the day after the event,
contended that “what these girls are showing us is that this is not just about rage. It is a defiant stand for youth and hope” (Jones 2010).

This study intervenes in these debates around young women’s status in neoliberal society and seeks to understand the ways in which young women construct their political and gendered subjectivities as social movement activists. In documenting the lived experiences of young women for whom political action is the norm it provides alternative narratives of youth engagement that necessitate a broadening of our definitions of the political. The study examines the mobilising factors and political practice of young female activists as a means of understanding how they are positioned in relation to the prevailing neoliberal postfeminist gender order. Within the context of these regimes, it considers the ways in which these young women navigate and negotiate issues of gender, politics and agency, and concludes that in spite of neoliberal and postfeminist proclamations of the individualism of young women, for some the ideals of collectivism and solidarity remain at the heart of their ways of being in the world. It further exposes the contradiction between young women’s invisibility within social movement theory and practice, and their hyper visibility within social movement spaces by way of their status as ‘somatic others’ (Puwar 2004a). In order to do so, the thesis draws on the narratives of 20 young women participating in anarchist and environmental activism in the UK, three diaries completed by interviewees, and participatory observations of activist spaces and events.

Einwohner et al (2000) have documented how social movements are gendered in five specific ways, namely in their composition, goals, tactics, identities and attributions. Beyond this the gendered features of movement organisations are shaped in no small part by the particularity of movements’ histories and political ideologies, and as such it is worth expanding Einwohner et al’s framework to include the organisational structures and hierarchies of power, and the outcomes and transformations, of social movements. The extent to which social movement gender regimes are idiosyncratic is such that it is insufficient to examine young women’s experiences of gender, politics and agency in the abstract; rather these experiences need to be addressed in the specific context of particular movements. As such two movements, each with distinct
histories and political ideologies but which have both more recently been informed by feminist theory, have been studied: anarchism and environmentalism.

**Structure of the thesis**

**Chapter 2** reviews the relevant existing literature as it pertains to the current state of youth and political participation, with a particular focus on the status of girls and young women in late modernity. It interrogates the notion that the increasing flexibilisation and individualisation of this period has led to a declining influence of traditional structuring forces such as gender. In doing so it identifies the current prevailing neoliberal and postfeminist ideologies that some feminist scholars have identified as positioning young women as the ideal subjects of late modernity. In light of these arguments it considers the current ‘crisis’ in young people’s political and civic engagement and argues for a broader understanding of politics and citizenship that better encompasses young people’s, and particularly young women’s, political and participatory orientations. From here the discussion moves to a consideration of social movements as spaces of youth politics and considers the relatively recent efforts to examine social movements through a gender lens in order to better understand how gendered ideologies, structures and actions operate within alternative political spaces. The relative dearth of research into the specific experiences of young women as activists is highlighted before considering the need to attend to the processes by which young people construct gendered subjectivities and the ways in which these are implicated in the development of political agency.

**Chapter 3** serves as an introduction to anarchist and environmental social movements in the UK by briefly detailing their ideological and historical emergence. In providing a sense of the historical and political contexts of their development, attention is drawn to the role of gender in their political philosophies and organising practices, and to their representations of gender.

**Chapter 4** outlines the methodological framework informing the study and offers a detailed reflexive account of the research design and data collection process. It reflects on the choices made in relation to methods and sampling, as well as considering the ethical and access issues that were encountered during the course of the research.
As the first empirical chapter, **Chapter 5** is concerned with ‘beginnings’. Using aspects of their life history narratives it considers how the early experiences of the young women studied have contributed to their current activism and political orientations as ‘wilful women’. It problematises conventional understandings of political socialisation as hierarchical and top-down that presume young people to be empty vessels and offers an alternative interpretation of the political and social development of young women that emphasises the role of relational agency. It identifies some of the key moments and relationships that served to politicise and mobilise these young women. It reflects on the centrality of gender socialisation to young women’s gendered subjectivities and identifies ways in which progressive parenting has imbued participants with a sense of efficacy that transgresses traditional gender roles and expectations. As such it highlights the important role that feminism has played in these young women’s political beginnings and becomings. The concept of ‘significant (m)others’ is introduced as a means to theorise the influence of ‘intergenerational worlds of women’ for the formative political experiences of young women. Attention is also paid to the educational and peer influences.

**Chapter 6** undertakes an analysis of the role that organisational structures play in women’s experiences of activism. Specifically it contrasts women’s experiences of working within formalised and professionalised environmental organisations with experiences within non-hierarchical grassroots groups. The impact of professionalization and NGOisation on some environmental organisations is considered in relation to gender mainstreaming and diversity policy, finding that hierarchical structures contribute to homogeneity of employees at the highest levels of organisations. The lack of women in decision-making positions within organisations is shown to effect organisational priorities, while horizontal gender segregation is visible in the roles women are likely to be employed within. Attempts are being made to address issues of diversity in environmental NGOs (ENGOs) but for the most part these are piecemeal and are reliant on the work of minority individuals in low-status roles within organisations. In contrast, the explicit commitment to non-hierarchical organising with anarchistic groups is perceived as overwhelmingly positive by interviewees. However an exploration of the informal operation of power within these spaces problematises easy assumptions of utopian gender equality. Participants’
experiences of sexism are considered in relation to the anti-oppressive work that is being undertaken within informal social movement organisations, with this pedagogic work being theorised as examples of ‘practices of resistance’ that encourage young women’s active participation and contribution to the political lifeworld.

Having considered the spaces of social movements, Chapter 7 turns its attention to the ways in which young women construct and perform gender as activists. Utilising West and Zimmerman’s (1987) ‘doing gender’ framework, it considers how young female activists engage with and contest normative gender performances within the alternative political spaces of social movements. Participants’ dress and appearance is examined in relation to movement critiques of consumption and normative beauty standards and the role of style in producing collective identities. The chapter identifies participants’ vexed relationships with femininity and highlights the importance of appearance management in managing their activist credibility. The perceived incompatibility of femininity and activism is identified in women’s careful management of their appearance and their efforts to project an authentic, credible activist identity. However, interviewees’ attempts to ‘negate’ gender through androgynous dress and appearance are shown to be frequently unsuccessful, as their sex role categorisation trumps their gender performance. The process of redoing gender is found to be more successful in the physicality and embodiment of activism. Repertoires of protest that require activists to occupy space are demonstrated to encourage women to rethink the relationship between femininity, embodiment and physical space. In this way alternative ways of being in the world as ‘wilful women’ are opened up that represent a conscious embodiment of feminist agency, emphasising ableness, agency and autonomy.

Chapter 8 picks up on feminist themes that have been identified in earlier chapters and considers the relevance of young female activists’ feminist identification to their political engagement and sense of agency. It examines the place of feminism in environmentalism and anarchism as ‘non-feminist social movements’ and identifies contradictions between activist theory and practice. Participants’ experiences of sexism and hostility to gender analysis are considered in reference to their beliefs about the role of feminism in anarchist and environmental practice, and in particular,
the credence given to anarchafeminist and ecofeminist discourses. The identification of widespread experiences of sexism and silencing leads to a discussion of participants’ feminist praxis within and outside of these movements. Women’s attempts to integrate feminist analysis into movements through anti-oppressive pedagogies and reflexive practices are explored alongside their work to create and participate in explicitly feminist spaces outside of anarchism and/or environmentalism. It is within this context that the importance of women-only spaces of activism is discussed.

Chapter 9 explores the emotional work undertaken by participants within their activism. It begins by offering an account of one aspect of emotional work, that of coping with and addressing burnout. The significance of burnout to activist communities is discussed in relation to movement sustainability and individual wellbeing and is demonstrated to be a significant, if little acknowledged, issue within social movements. Individual and collective responses to burnout are examined, and participants’ commitment to developing movement-based strategies for addressing the emotional impacts of activism is highlighted as challenging neoliberal discourses of young women’s individualism. The role of gendered emotion cultures is demonstrated to contribute to the burden of responsibility for emotion work falling to women, a phenomenon that the women themselves identify as resulting from normative gender roles and women’s socialisation as carers. From here, the potential for a degendering of care is explored in relationship to social movement sustainability and the reshaping of politics as both theory and practice. A consideration of the centrality of care to participants’ activist identities prompts a challenge to dominant theories of young women’s individualism and apoliticism and suggests that young women’s care-based social movement activism represents the performance of a resistive and relational form of citizenship.

Finally, Chapter 10 draws together the findings of the preceding chapters to offer a conclusion to the study’s research questions. It highlights the relationship between neoliberalism, postfeminism, contemporary crises regarding youth participation, and the construction of alternative gendered subjectivities by young women whose political agency is at heart relational. It revisits the original theoretical concepts developed in the course of the thesis and considers the strengths and weaknesses of
the thesis overall, before suggesting potential future directions for research in light of the findings considered here.

Chapter 2
Situating Young Women’s Activism: A Review of the Theoretical and Empirical Literature

Introduction
The context in which this research is located is that of late modernity: a period characterised by the intensification of the conditions of modernity (Beck 1992; Beck et al 1994; Giddens 1990, 1991; Lash 1990). The transition from modern to late modern societies is conceptualised by Beck et al (1994) as ‘reflexive modernisation’, whereby the influence of traditional social ties and grand narratives declines in favour of processes of individualisation and reflexivity. Collective and community-based identities predicated on experiences of class, gender and ethnicity are increasingly replaced by a ‘reflexive project of the self’ in which self-identity is managed and maintained through the production and revision of biographical narratives of choice that privilege the capacity of the individual to consciously respond to uncertain and risk-ridden local and global contexts (Giddens 1991). Western societies in late modernity are characterised by uncertainty and flux; a hyperconnected global system in which the successful management and negotiation of risk is achieved not through traditional collectivist approaches, but by flexible individuals whose reflexive construction of choice biographies facilitate independence and self-realisation (Beck et al 1994; Giddens 1991). Uncertainty and insecurity has come to define employment, as deindustrialisation has seen long-term, full-time, secure jobs replaced by part-time, flexible, temporary and zero-hours contracts (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991). The global nature of many corporations is such that jobs can disappear in a moment as operations are moved overseas to countries where wages are lower, tax regimes are less stringent, or safety legislation is less onerous. Meanwhile, states’ responsibilities for social rights and welfare for their citizens is increasingly abrogated as they seek to outsource support for and oversight of the elderly, unemployed, disabled, ill or
incarcerated to private companies operating under profit motivations (Giddens 1991; Rodger 2000).

The transition to late modernity has occurred concurrently with, and is inextricably linked to, the emergence of neoliberal political economy (Dawson 2013). Neoliberalism celebrates individual, entrepreneurial freedom, as the market is freed from the oppressive control of the nation state through the privatisation of state assets and the establishment of free markets. With wealth and power increasingly located within transnational corporations and a small number of wealthy individuals, the role of the state is reduced to guaranteeing the conditions in which markets can thrive (Harvey 2005). As David Harvey (2005) contends, neoliberalism “holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market” (2005:3).

In its fervent celebration of the individual and its promotion of freedom and choice, neoliberalism seeks to establish a political and social regime in which governance is no longer solely the responsibility of the state. Indeed, Harvey (2005:66) contends that neoliberal theorists are “profoundly suspicious of democracy” as majority rule threatens individual rights and liberties. Rather, neoliberalism acts as “a mentality of governance” (Rose 1992:145) wherein power operates through subjectivity and the individual internalises discourses of personal fulfilment and choice. Neoliberalism “does not seek to govern through ‘society’, but through the regulated choices of individual citizens, now construed as subjects of choices and aspirations to self-actualisation and self-fulfilment” (Barry, Osborne and Rose 1996:41).

Despite the declining influence of structural forces and the increasing individualisation that characterise late modernity and neoliberal ideology (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002), criticisms of the extent of these processes remain pertinent. It is within the context of these debates about the ongoing influence of social structures that this chapter now turns to explore the continued relevance of gender to the lived experiences and subjectivities of young women. With reference to neoliberal and postfeminist ideologies I explore the current status of ‘girlhood’ and consider the new subject positions open to young women. In consideration of the political focus of this thesis, I then explore how these new subject positions implicate young women in a
crisis of youth political participation and provide an overview of critiques of the ‘crisis of democracy’ thesis. In doing so I open up the discussion of political participation to examine social movements as spaces of youth politics, before reviewing some of the key literature addressing women’s social movement participation. A relative neglect of young women’s social movement experiences is identified, which this research addresses. The chapter concludes by making an argument for the necessity of studying young women’s gendered subjectivity and political agency in order to consider how their political participation challenges the neoliberal postfeminist subject positions currently available to young women.

Gender in late modernity and the rise of postfeminism

While structures such as gender, class and race have undoubtedly been subjected to an ongoing transformation, and life influences and identities have been reshaped as a result of processes of modernisation and globalisation, feminist scholars have criticised claims that they have been rendered obsolete. Their key areas of critique have focused on the detraditionalisation vs retraditionalisation of gender debate, and new configurations of femininity within postfeminism.

Lisa Adkins (2002) has argued that “reflexivity and mobility are the crucial ground for the reconfiguration of gender” (2002:5). Noting Beck’s contention that the declining influence of social structures under modernisation has resulted in the an increased capacity for agency on the part of individual subjects, Adkins (2003) nevertheless refutes a simplistic interpretation of reflexivity that contends that the individual creates the self through an ongoing reflexive conduct rather than the self being moulded by structural forces. Drawing on Bourdieusian notions of habitus to theorise gender in late modernity, Adkins (2003) argues that rather than axes of difference becoming a matter of individual choice that results in individuals “being released from the constraints of gender” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1996:29), critical reflexivity and social change arise in contexts where there is a disruption in fit between habitus and field: “a dissonance between the feel for the game and the game itself” (Adkins 2003:26). That is, women’s ways of knowing and being in the world no longer fit with the world that they are expected to inhabit. However, Adkins (2003) is sceptical of the extent to which critical reflexivity has the potential to contribute to the
detraditionalisation of gender because of a tendency to theorise such reflexivity as separate from habitus. For Adkins, “reflexivity does not concern a liberal freedom from gender, but may be tied into new arrangements of gender” (2003:34). Rather than being separate from unconscious, habituated forms of action, the centrality of reflexivity to the economic field and the workplace in late modernity is such that it should more appropriately be considered as integral to gendered habitus. Specifically for women, reflexivity has come to be understood as an essential part of femininity that is enacted unconsciously, thereby limiting the possibilities for the detraditionalisation of gender (Adkins 2003).

However, while the claims that gender is undergoing a process of detraditionalisation may be overstated, it is certainly being reconfigured. Young women above all others have been identified as uniquely placed as the ideal subjects for the late modern gender order and are offered a series of new subject positions under neoliberalism that were unavailable to previous generations of women (Gonick 2006; Harris 2004a; Nielsen 2004; Rich 2005). They are variously “ideal neo-liberal subjects” (Nayak and Kehily 2008:52), signifiers of the future (Harris 2004a) and “privileged subjects of social change” (McRobbie 2009:15). Young people broadly are considered to be best placed to succeed in the individualised, detraditionalised and risky context of late modernity because it is all they have ever known (Harris 2004a:5). They have not been wrenched from formalised collective identities or support structures, but were born into a society in which individual achievement is the norm. Nor have they had to grapple to master new communications technologies, but rather have grown up viewing them as a natural mode of engagement with the social world. Furthermore, this self-construction and responsibility for their life trajectories is understood not as an abandonment by the state to fend for themselves, but a liberation from structural constraints; a freedom to define who they want to be through the choices they make in ongoing projects of the self. However, Harris (2004) has explored the ways in which young women in particular “are being constructed as a vanguard of new subjectivity” (2004:1) and identifies two related processes by which this has occurred. The first relates to shifts in the spheres of education and employment, and the perceived benefits of these for women. The final decades of the 20th century saw not only the restructuring of the global economy as a result of accelerated globalisation and the
dominance of neoliberal economic and social policies, but also a considerable shift in the status of women as a result of concerted feminist campaigning, particularly in the areas of education and employment. No longer were women expected to forego careers in favour of being financially supported by their husbands, and instead their equal participation in education was encouraged by government legislation and policy that curtailed the more apparent forms of sex discrimination. At the same time, labour markets have been restructured in such a way that they require highly educated, flexible workers. The disappearance of well-paid, full-time jobs for unskilled young people has necessitated longer periods in education, while part-time employment provides opportunities for young women to combine studying and familial responsibilities with the chance to earn enough to participate in consumer capitalism.

Harris’s (2004) second process by which young women have come to be positioned as the ideal neoliberal subjects results from the ideological synergy between neoliberalism and postfeminism. The progressive agenda of feminism sought to liberate women from restrictive gender roles and responsibilities and to open up opportunities that facilitated women’s choices and autonomy. However, while feminism situated these freedoms within a political commitment to collective liberation and struggle, the depoliticising effect of postfeminism has dovetailed with neoliberalism’s emphasis on individualism to create a version of feminism that celebrates individual achievement and empowerment, without presenting a challenge to the ideological status quo. Postfeminism, as Judith Stacey (1987) has defined it, is the “simultaneous incorporation, revision and depoliticisation of many of the central goals of second-wave feminism” (1987:8). In proclaiming feminism’s success, it at once calls for an end to feminism’s political project. In a context of proclamations of gender equality, feminism is positioned as outdated and restrictive. Instead, young women celebrate their new-found freedoms through the pursuit of individual success, irrespective of the enduring structural inequalities that may hamper their achievement. For Gill (2008) the resonance between neoliberalism and postfeminism is evident in the extent to which it is women far more than men who are required to regulate their conduct and work on their project of the self, thus demonstrating that neoliberalism is always already gendered. As Harris (2004) concludes, “young women are thus doubly constructed as ideal flexible subjects; they are imagined as benefiting
from feminist achievements and ideology, as well as from new conditions that favour their success by allowing them to put these into practice” (2004:8).

Angela McRobbie (2007, 2008, 2009) argues that postfeminism, as a ‘new sexual contract’ for young women, represents a retrenchment and retraditionalisation of gender. Young women are attributed capacity to act through employment and consumption as “exemplars of the new competitive meritocracy” (McRobbie 2007:718). However these sites of action serve as complex strategies of governmentality whereby participation and its associated freedoms is dependent on abandoning of feminist critiques of power and conforming to a non-threatening mode of emphasised femininity (c.f. Connell 1987). The new sexual contract ensures the re-stabilisation of gender hierarchy and a renewal of institutionalised gender inequalities while offering young women a sense of agency and success through consumerism and perceived sexual liberation (McRobbie 2007). As such, girlhood becomes a “social category understood primarily as being endowed with economic capacity” (McRobbie 2007:722). Young women’s access to these ‘privileged’ positions is underpinned by the ‘postfeminist masquerade’; a performance of hyperfemininity that, in its stiletto heels, perfectly applied lipstick and six-weekly hair-stylist appointments reassures patriarchal interests that despite their increasing economic and educational equality, these young women ‘choose’ to remain located within traditional gender hierarchies. The postfeminist masquerade shores up hegemonic masculinity as it “disavows the spectral, powerful and castrating figures of the lesbian and the feminist with whom they might conceivably be linked” (McRobbie 2007:725). It ensures that in spite of their success and increasing access to masculine domains, women remain unthreatening in relation to male supremacy and the heterosexual matrix. Chapter 7 of this thesis assesses the versions of femininity that young female activists perform with reference to McRobbie’s theory of the postfeminist masquerade.

Central to the postfeminist masquerade is consumption as a site of young women’s capacity. Whether this is enacted through excessive feminine adornment or by emulating “the assertive and hedonistic styles of sexuality associated with young men” (McRobbie 2007:732) in spaces of leisure and recreation, the conditions of young women’s new-found visibility “are defined primarily by the commercial domain”
The celebration of agency through participation in consumer culture serves to reinforce neoliberal ideals of individualism. The simultaneous integration and repudiation of feminism in the construction of new femininities enables a marketised and depoliticised version of feminism to be sold back to young women as ‘Girl Power’, ensuring that commercial values occupy a critical place in the formation contemporary girlhood (McRobbie 2008:532). In doing so neoliberal governmentality serves to “re-define female citizenship in directions contrary to those of public-mindedness, political participation, democratic accountability, social welfare” (McRobbie 2008:533).

However, this all-encompassing portrayal of successful young women endowed with capacity overlooks the experiences of young women who have not succeeded in education and employment. While structural critiques may highlight the significance of class, ethnicity, (dis)ability etc, on differential access to education and the impacts of poverty and marginalisation, under neoliberal discourse of individual choice, the failure of these young women is considered to result from poor choices, insufficient effort and personal deficiencies. The demonization and pathologisation of young women who have ‘failed’ is inevitable when success is seen as the result of self-actualisation, and the contrast of ‘at-risk girls’ to the ‘can-do girl’ (Harris 2004a) reinforces the discourse of individual success and meritocracy. Furthermore, the dominance of consumption as the primary site of young women’s agency excludes those without the necessary economic capital from access to an essentially individualised form of citizenship (Harris 2004a).

Having considered feminist engagements with the detraditionalisation and retraditionalisation of gender, and the potential new subjectivities available to young women within postfeminism, this thesis is concerned to explore how these debates feed into debates surrounding political participation. Harris’s (2004) work on young women’s social status and positioning has at its centre a consideration of the subject positions and forms of citizenship presented to young women within the wider context of youth citizenship. A focus on citizenship thus provides a relevant entry point to understandings of contemporary discourses around young women’s political (dis)engagement.
Youth political participation in crisis

Young women’s access to citizenship is of critical importance for understandings of political participation because of the inherent relationship between the two processes. For Dalton (2008) it is the citizenship norms of a society that determine political participation: “since citizenship identifies what is expected of the individual and what the individual expects of government, it should influence a range of political attitudes and behaviours” (Dalton 2008:84). However public participation in politics is also considered to be an essential aspect of democratic citizenship (Dalton 2008:78). As such, in offering up a consumption-based form of ‘active’ citizenship to young women, neoliberal regimes serve only to reaffirm the contemporary ‘crisis’ of young people’s political engagement. A significant body of scholarly work has emerged within the last three decades that addresses a perceived ‘crisis of democracy’ triggered by young people’s political alienation and civic disengagement (e.g. Furlong and Cartmel 2007; Park et al 2004; Parry et al 1992; Putnam 2000; Wilkinson and Mulgan 1995). Low voter turnout amongst the youngest eligible age group and declining party membership, coupled with reduced levels of trust in politicians are framed as reflecting a crisis of legitimacy in politics that must be addressed (Henn et al 2002).

However, some scholars have argued that the perceived ‘crisis’ in young people’s political participation is that it results from a narrow definition of the political, and as such, a limited scope for participation (e.g. Henn et al 2002; Manning 2010; O'Toole 2003). As Stolle et al (2005) have demonstrated, young people’s political activity is often not informed by an orientation to state-based governance and as such a preoccupation with representative democracy is particularly unlikely to capture the political behaviour of young people and young women especially. In particular, the elision of voting and politics reduces the political to a minimally participatory process. As Dalton (2008:85) contends, “elections provide infrequent and fairly blunt tools of political influence.” In many statistical studies of young people’s political participation, the ‘political’ is restricted to mainstream, formalised processes. For example, in spite of a proclamation that their study adopts a “very broad definition of political participation as taking part in the processes of formulation, passage and implementation of public policies” (1992:16), Parry et al’s (1992) study is limited to the politics performed by “public representatives and officials” (1992:16). Participation is
thus operationalised as “voting, writing to a Member of Parliament or contacting a local councillor, going to the town hall or a government department office to discuss a problem, canvassing support for a political party, attending a public meeting to protest about an issue, signing a petition, joining a pressure group, going on a demonstration march” (1992:17). Apparent here is the separation of public/private, and political/civic that continues to feature in much research into young people’s participation and which supports a ‘democratic deficit’ thesis (O’Toole et al 2003; Lopes et al 2009).

Research into young people’s political participation has suffered not only from narrow definitions of the political but has also been limited to top-down methodologies that give insufficient consideration to young people’s own reasons for participation and non-participation (O’Toole et al 2003. See also Henn et al 2002; Sloam 2007). As such, survey-based research too often erroneously equates non-participation in a small range of political activities with political apathy (Henn et al 2002; O’Toole et al 2003). Instead, in-depth, qualitative approaches that privilege young people’s narratives have the potential to illuminate how young people’s disillusionment with traditional political institutions overshadows their general interest in political issues (Henn et al 2002; O’Toole et al 2003).

Nonetheless, in response to this perceived crisis, successive governments, both in the UK and across the West, have sought to inculcate appropriate citizenship attitudes into young people through formal education programmes (Lopes et al 2009; Manning 2010; O’Toole et al 2003). In England citizenship education was introduced as a statutory subject in 2002 as a means of promoting political and civic engagement amongst young people (Lopes et al 2009). It was intended to serve as a means by which young people could gain the relevant skills and knowledge that would facilitate their later participation in institutionalised political processes (Lopes et al 2009). Yet youth civic engagement programmes are “designed to produce and reproduce a particular political order and particular types of citizens” (Taft and Gordon 2013:88) and as such their implementation and use have been criticised as a means by which to “manage and contain youth dissent and more rebellious forms of political activity” (Taft 2011:39).
Despite the focus on youth, specifically it is young women who are at the heart of a wider perceived crisis over young people’s political participation and civic engagement (Lawless and Fox 2013; Norris et al 2004). While young people in general are frequently perceived to be alienated and apathetic, it is young women in particular who for some time have been seen to be the most disengaged from politics (e.g. Wilkinson and Mulgan 1995). A considerable amount of political science scholarship in the post-war period has cited the presence of a gender gap in political participation, contending that not only are women less likely than their male counterparts to engage in formal political activity but also that as a whole they hold more conservative views that place them on the right of the political spectrum (Inglehart and Norris 2000). As Inglehart and Norris have documented, early explanations for difference in political affiliation were ascribed to the likes of participation in the labour force and religiosity (2000:443), but these began to be challenged in the 1980s as scholars began to observe a decline in women’s conservativism that realigned them with their more left-leaning male counterparts (2000:443). However, the ideological dominance of postfeminism has been identified by some feminist scholars as contributing to young women’s disengagement from politics, and gender politics in particular (McRobbie 2009; Scharff 2012; Stevenson et al 2011).

More recent research on the gender gap has emphasised differing levels of political participation among men and women, with differences amongst young people drawing particular attention (Cicognani et al 2012; Fridkin and Kenney 2007; Hooghe and Stolle 2004). Briggs (2008) has detailed how contemporary research into youth political activity has highlighted a gender gap in political participation, wherein young men are seen as significantly more likely to engage in traditional forms of participation such as voting and direct action. Young women, while not entirely disengaged, are more likely to engage in ‘private’ forms of activism, with, for example, young women being more likely than their male counterparts to volunteer, donate money, or write letters to politicians (Briggs 2008:582. See also Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010). An examination of young women’s wider social roles and familial responsibilities problematises simplistic assumptions of young women’s political apathy and instead suggests that the likes of caring commitments can better explain this participation gap (Briggs 2008:583). Furthermore, a degree of gender blindness continues to exist within political science
research into youth political participation whereby gender is analysed as a variable of difference rather than as a lens through which to view these differences.

As a basic organising principle of society, gender shapes both young people’s access to and perceptions of politics. Research that is attendant to the significance of gender as a shaping factor in youth political participation is necessary if we are to understand the way in which young women’s experiences and perceptions of politics determine their participation. Voet (1998:94) has argued that the socialisation of girls into apolitical identities begins early, while stereotypical assumptions that politics is not relevant to – or appropriate for – girls are only compounded by the significant underrepresentation of women in formal political roles. Although the Labour Party’s efforts to instigate all-women shortlists for the 1997 general election helped to return a record number of women to parliament (Childs 2000), seventeen years later women still only make up 23% of UK MPs (Cracknell and Keen 2014). Not only do women make up less than a quarter of the members of the most prominent political institution in the country, but female MPs are repeatedly the targets of sexist commentary, whether from media outlets that prefer to focus on their sartorial choices than their political decisions (Kenny 2014; Ross et al 2013), or from the Prime Minister who deemed it appropriate to instruct opposition minister Angela Eagle to “calm down, dear” (Wintour 2011). The marginalisation of women in politics, Lovenduski (2014:16) argues, is hardwired into the gendered institutions of parliament that were originally designed to exclude women. Thus, young women observing the public school boy performances in formal political arenas such as the House of Commons are left in little doubt that politics is a hostile place for women (McKay 2011; Okimoto and Brescoll 2010; Ross 2002; Tamale 2000; Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007).

Research such as that undertaken by Hava Rachel Gordon (2008) into girls’ political participation has indicated that complex gendered family relationships significantly impact upon the extent to which girls are able to enact political subjectivities (see also Albanesi et al, 2012; Cicognani et al 2012). This is in part attributed to girls’ lack of familial autonomy relative to boys and the extent to which parents place greater restrictions on their participation in public political activities. This serves to limit girls’ access to important networking opportunities and skills development that are
available through collective action and that are frequent determining factors in continued political engagement (Gordon 2008:51). As a consequence, the activism that girls and young women are most likely to engage in is, as Briggs (2008) similarly found, considerably less public and therefore less visible than that of their male counterparts.

In spite of the efforts of those active within the second wave feminist movement to assert that the personal is political, the findings of Briggs (2008) and Gordon (2008) demonstrate that the visibility of political activism remains central to the assessment of young people’s political commitment. Critical to the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s was an intellectual critique of ‘malestream’ politics which served to challenge the false dichotomy of public and private spheres. Feminists identified the heavily gendered nature of the political sphere and considered women’s exclusion from political decision-making to be central to their oppression (Charles 2008). By locating the political firmly within the public sphere of male activity, women’s experiences within the private sphere of the home went unrecognised. The role of consciousness-raising – a key part of second-wave feminist activism – was to break down exactly this barrier and to allow women to identify their personal experiences as resulting from wider structural inequalities within a patriarchal system of power (Frye 1996:35). As a result, women’s experiences were seen to be shared rather than individual and personal acts of resistance to gendered power relations and oppression came to be viewed as part of an inherently political struggle. The continued relevance of feminism for young women’s political participation is explored in greater detail in Chapter 8.

However, although ‘the personal is political’ became a defining refrain of the women’s liberation movement, research documents that younger women continue to have difficulties identifying their own acts of resistance as political. Work by Harris and Bulbeck (2008) has illustrated how the young women in their study had formulated a set of precise criteria that activism had to meet before they would consider it as political and as such rejected the notion that their own activism was political (see also Bobel 2007). The authors described the criteria as “whether or not the activity could or did ‘change’ people and whether or not the action involved politicians and political parties” (Harris and Bulbeck 2008:227). These problems with defining and owning
'politics' have been argued to be symptomatic of the dominance in Western societies of the liberal paradigm (Young 1997). Liberalism’s equation of the private with the non-political has served to characterise the state and its associated government as the dominant site of power (Young 1997:5). As such, resistance and protest that does not engage directly with state actors is rendered apolitical. Young (1997) argues that such paradigms have considerable consequences for the legitimisation of feminist activism and its practices of cultural resistance and discursive politics. Furthermore, the significance of any kind of collective action is minimised as a result of liberalism’s emphasis of the individual in debates of political agency (Denham and Slawner 1998:1). Yet in light of young people’s (and particularly young women’s) disillusionment with formal political institutions, it is necessary to attend to the informal, cultural and discursive political practices in which they are more likely to engage. As such, I now turn to an examination of research locating youth political participation within the spaces of social movements.

**Social movements as spaces of youth politics**

Traditional political science research’s focus on engagement with formal political institutions of the state has been demonstrated to neglect the forms of political participation that young people engage in. Of particular significance for the study of young women’s political participation is a focus on what Buechler (2000) conceptualises as ‘social’ politics. A theory of social politics acknowledges the decentralised and diffuse nature of power within contemporary society that state politics, with its focus on centralised political institutions does not (2000:177). Consequently, forms of social political activism (such as those engaged in by social movements) are not “prepolitical, apolitical, metapolitical or cultural” (2000:177) but rather are inherently political in their own right. Drawing on Foucault’s (1979) theory of a microphysics of power in which power infuses all forms of social life, Buechler contends that social actors are always already engaged in resistance to an omnipresent power and as such “no action is really ‘apolitical’” (2000:177). Nonetheless, Buechler is cautious of Foucault’s negation of the possibility of the agency of rational and conscious subjects and utilises Giddens’ theory of structuration to reinstate the subject as a reflexive agent (2000:178). With reference to ‘life politics’, Buechler bridges the divide between individual and collective action, contending that movements operate
at both levels, with individual resistance being seen to occur within the wider context of subgroups and movements. Using the example of resistance to socially imposed identities, Buechler further documents how the construction of alternative identities by individuals “undermines the privileged status of the imposed identity, establishes the viability of an alternative identity and challenges the social power behind the imposed identity” (2000:178). For the purposes of this research then, the resistance of young women to the imposition of dominant apolitical and consumerist identities by citizenship programmes and consumer capitalism through the articulation of active and political subjectivities constitutes an inherently political act. Crucially, however, resistance through identity transformation can be seen to occur within a group context, such as in subcultures or social movements whose collectivity reinforce and support such actions (Buechler 2000:178), as I document in Chapter 7.

An understanding of social political participation serves to illuminate young people’s participation in radical politics and social movements as a means of counteracting the invisibility that narrow definitions of the political produce. Conventional state-oriented understandings of participation are reflective of the ways in which social movement activism is all too often framed by governments and policy makers as deviant and dissident. If any positive outcomes of the election of the Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010 can be identified, the large-scale mobilisation of young people in response to cuts to Educational Maintenance Allowance and the trebling of university tuition fees, and the resulting spectacle of protest, must be one. Whether through the occupation of university buildings, thousand-strong demonstrations on the streets of London, or local protests against the closure of youth centres, forms of concerted collective action by and on behalf of young people served to challenge notions of youth political apathy and instead highlight their distrust of, and anger at, the political elite (Ibrahim 2011; Rheingans and Hollands 2013; Salter and Kay 2011). However, as Shukra et al (2012) emphasise, this action stood in direct contrast to attempts by successive British governments to promote forms of acquiescent participation amongst a ‘disaffected’ youth. A series of formalised youth participation programmes (both voluntary and coercive) have been instituted as a solution to a range of youth ‘problems’, including “alienation, gang warfare, urban incivility, disorder and cynicism towards representative democracy” (Shukra 2012:41).
The promotion of government-approved channels of participation is contrasted with the police violence deployed against young people protesting about cuts to education and services. As Shukra et al (2012:42) elucidate, “while strong civic participation was encouraged, independent activism was met with the full force of the law.”

The emergence of a new wave of youth activism brings into relief the significance of social movements as spaces of dissident youth politics. While social movements became synonymous with youth radicalism in the wake of the New Left in the 1960s (Scott 2014), more recently young people’s position at the vanguard of social movements has been obscured by the dominance of youth apathy discourses (Flesher Fominaya 2012). Despite young people constituting a large and active proportion of the participants in social movement, there remains an implicit assumption in much social movement theory that social movement actors are exclusively or overwhelmingly adults (Gordon 2007:635). The opposition of many social movements to the dominance of liberal models of representative democracy and institutionalisation of political power makes them attractive to young people who are similarly disengaged from and disaffected with such forms of politics (Flesher Fominaya 2012). Recognition that age operates as an axis of inequality as much as gender, ethnicity or class, illuminates the extent to which young people represent a marginalised group within contemporary politics (Gordon 2007; Taft and Gordon 2013). Taft and Gordon (2013) have documented how adolescent activists interpret democracy differently than is presented by youth engagement programmes. The young activists Taft and Gordon (2013) studied emphasised action over voice – youth engagement programmes conflate voice and influence, but activists were cynical about the frequency with which adult political elites bothered to listen to these voices. They also spoke of the importance of collective responses to social problems, emphasising the significance of social movements as productive spaces of youth politics. However, if youth is an area of social movement studies that has been under-examined, then so too is gender. As such I now turn to examine research that has applied a gender lens to social movement activism and identify some of the key areas in which social movements are gendered.

**Gendering social movements**
Social movements can be viewed as “conscious, organised, and collective actions to bring about or resist social change” (Kuumba 2001:5). They are “the product of people trying to come to terms with circumstances they view as unacceptable by employing ostensibly non-political means to achieve political ends” (Meyer 2000:36). As Tétreault and Teske (2000:9) have argued, the large presence of women in informal politics is such that women have, throughout history, been integral to most major social movements. However gender has traditionally been absent from much social movement theory, with a ‘gender-neutral’ approach resulting from what Taft (2011:93) identifies as “a deeper philosophical assumption that the only universal is the White, Western, heterosexual male. All else is reduced to its particularity.” Similarly, Kuumba (2001:13) has argued that the contributions of women to social movements have been obscured by androcentric approaches to their documentation and study. At the heart of this problem, I argue, is a reluctance to acknowledge social movements as institutions, and as such there has been a lack of recognition of the extent to which social movement organisations are structured by gender. Feminist theorists of work have made significant progress in explicating the gendered nature of organisations in the last 25 years, with Acker (1990;1992a;1992b) in particular laying sound foundations. Yet in spite of these advances, the application of gendered organisational theory to social movements has been slower to develop. The forthcoming chapters seek to address this issue, and do so by considering the gendered nature of young women’s experiences of social movement activism as related to the contemporary neoliberal postfeminist gender order, and localised social movement gender regimes (Connell 1987).

Connell’s (1987) gender order represents the dominant societal state of power relations between men and women, expressed and maintained through normative performances of masculinity and femininity. As “the generalised programmes” of gender relations (Connell 1987:137), the gender order manifests locally, within individual organisations, as a gender regime. While gender regimes are most easily identifiable in “compact formal organisations” (1987:120) such as the schools of Connell’s research, gender regimes also structure more diffuse institutions, thereby making social movements valid sites of analysis. The particularity of individual organisations is such that although localised gender regimes necessarily share many of
the features of the wider gender order, they also present opportunities for defiance of social norms, “and in some circumstances may even reverse widespread patterns” (Connell 2005:10).

Expanding on an initial conceptualisation of gender regimes, Connell (2002:53-68) has since outlined four dimensions of gender regimes, namely gender division of labour; gender relations of power; emotion and human relations and gender culture and symbolism. Thus gender regimes determine the ways in which production and consumption, control and authority, and emotions and attachment are organised along gender lines, while also governing the prevailing norms of gender identities and differences. It is Connell’s (2002) proposition that by using this framework to interpret research findings enables the “characterisation of the state of play” (2002:11) of an organisation, that is, its gender regime.

Furthermore, central to Connell’s (1987; 2002) theorisation of gender orders and regimes is the notion of hegemonic masculinity. As the ‘ideal type’, hegemonic masculinity serves as the structural representation of men’s global dominance over women (1987:183); the ascendancy of one group of men through the interplay of social forces, maintained through cultural consent and complicity (1987:184). Femininity, in all its forms, is subordinated under hegemonic masculinity, as are non-hegemonic masculinities. Yet the fundamental asymmetry of gender is such that no version of femininity is hegemonic because, as Connell argues (1987:187), “the concentration of social power in the hands of men leaves limited scope for women to construct institutionalised power relationships over other women.” While intersectional feminist theory would point to the subordination of Women of Colour by White women, for Connell this kind of hierarchy is constructed at the interpersonal, rather than the structural, level, while femininity is not characterised through its dominance and authority over others as masculinity is (1987:187). As such, the normative form of femininity given the greatest degree of cultural and ideological support is not ‘hegemonic femininity’, but rather ‘emphasised femininity’. This is the performance of femininity that, in its passivity, sociability, and fragility, complies with and reinforces the dominance of hegemonic masculinity. Chapter 7 considers young
female activists’ engagement with emphasised and alternative femininities in more depth.

Furthermore, and as chapters 6 and 7 demonstrate, social movements as spaces of alternative politics provide opportunities to challenge mainstream conceptions of gender and as such non-hegemonic performances of masculinity are present. However, it is also the case that social movement actors continue to be shaped by the gender norms of the wider gender order and as such are not immune from their influences. As such, a consideration of the gender regimes operating within social movements provides a conceptual framework through which to analyse the experiences of young female activists, therefore enabling a gendered analysis of social movements that considers how gender operates at individual, social and ideational levels. In this way it is possible to develop an understanding of the differential positionalities of men and women as gendered (as well as classed, raced, etc) actors for whom certain spheres and practices of resistance are differentially available (Marchand 2000:62). A gendered analysis of social movements also requires a recognition of the contradictory processes of emancipation and oppression that can occur, such that, “on the one hand, gender roles, ideologies, and power systems can inhibit social movement activities and processes [but] on the other hand, these same gendered patterns can catalyse particular actions and contribute to the dynamism of social movement processes” (Kuumba 2001:14).

Verta Taylor (1999), for one, argues convincingly for the importance of a systematic theory of gender and social movements if social movement theory is ever to be convincing or effective. Firstly, a gendered analysis acknowledges that “gender hierarchy is partly created through organisational practices” (1999:9) and as such elucidates that gender (and intersecting issues) will shape social movement organisations as much as any other. The notion of movement gender regimes is particularly pertinent here. Secondly, existing gender neutral approaches have obscured gender stratification within the emergence of social movements and as such have limited our understanding and explanation of these phenomena. Thirdly, many social movements are mobilised around issues of gender identity, and gender figures prominently as an aspect of culture and practice in identity movements. This is true
beyond the obvious example of feminist movements, with issues of masculinity and femininity relevant in movements for causes as diverse as lesbian rights and White supremacy. Finally, social movements play a critical role in the social construction and reconstruction of gender and in the maintenance and reproduction of gender inequalities, necessitating an appropriately intersectional theoretical analysis that makes explicit the interactions between gender and social movements (Taylor 1999). In addition to arguing for the importance of gendered analyses of social movements, Taylor (1999:9) distinguishes three different levels at which gender operates – the interactional, the structural and the cultural – in order to better conceptualise micro, meso and macro processes. All of which is critical because, as Taylor (1999) contends, “gender hierarchy is so persistent that, even in movements that purport to be gender-inclusive, the mobilisation, leadership patterns, strategies, ideologies and even the outcomes of social movements are gendered” (1999:9). As such, the gendered nature of young women’s activist experiences at all three of these levels are examined throughout the thesis. Specifically, micro-level interactions feature particularly in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 9, organisational structures at the meso-level are central to Chapters 6 and 9, while the macro-level of movement ideologies and cultures features heavily in Chapters 3 and 8.

As a result of the ground-breaking work by the likes of Taylor, scholars engaging in gendered analyses of social movements have begun to identify some of the main areas of social movements that are gendered. Einwohner at al’s (2000) typology of gender processes in social movements, for example, identifies five key areas in which gender comes into play, namely in their gendered composition, gendered goals, gendered tactics, gendered identities, and gendered attributions. For Kuumba (2001), meanwhile, areas of significance that require detailed study are: movement emergence, mobilisation and recruitment; organisational structures and movement roles; collective action frames and identities; and outcomes and transformations.

A new field of gendered analyses of social movements has opened up, producing a relative abundance of studies that particularly explore the significance of gender as a mobilising factor and aspect of identity for female activists. However in large part these studies have either explored women’s experiences without reference to age, or
where life course has been significant, participants have rarely been young women. Indeed, one of the particularly fruitful areas of research into women’s activism and social movement politics has been in understandings of the significance of motherhood and maternal identity. In a range of studies of women’s political activism, maternal identities play a central role in both mobilisation and protest tactics. In the case of anti-toxins and anti-nuclear activism at sites such as Three Mile Island (Culley and Angelique 2003) and Love Canal (Brown and Ferguson 1995; Newman 2001), women’s situated knowledge as mothers has been identified as a critical mobilising factor. The discovery that the suburban community of Love Canal in New York State had been built on land contaminated with industrial chemical waste was in large part attributable to the research and activism of local residents and mothers, including Lois Gibbs and Debbie Cerrillo (Newman 2001). It was as mothers that they had witnessed the increasing frequency of illness in their children, as well as an unexpectedly high incidence of chronic conditions such as epilepsy and asthma, and a spate of miscarriages and birth defects (Hay 2009). The slow response from state officials to public health concerns mobilised a group of local residents, predominantly housewives and mothers, whose relentless campaigning eventually forced officials to facilitate their relocation. For the campaigners at Love Canal, motherhood served as their primary identity and “the focus on protecting the family and home promoted female leadership” (Hay 2009:117).

Feminised portrayals of women’s maternal and domestic roles can be seen to generate sympathy for a movement’s cause, as in the case of the McCartney sisters’ protests against interference in the police investigation of the murder of their brother by members of the Provisional IRA in Northern Ireland in 2005. As Aske (2006:164) documents, “sections of the press actively accentuated the feminised dimensions of the campaign” by referencing the sisters’ attractiveness, domesticity and their status as mothers. These romanticised and ‘ultra-feminine’ descriptions associated the sisters with essentialist notions of the inherent morality and ‘goodness’ of women, and can be seen to have “helped [...] gain support and sympathy for their campaign” (Aske 2006:164). In the McCartney sisters’ case femininity was a status conferred on them and their actions, rather than being initiated by the women themselves, yet the
influence this portrayal afforded them was embraced and utilised for the benefit of the campaign.

As well as serving as a mobilising factor for protest and generating sympathy for a cause, motherhood serves to feminise protest. In doing so it has the potential to advantage activists as protest based on familial ties does not threaten traditional ideas around gender roles, while cultural assumptions about women’s apoliticism make them unlikely and unexpected activists. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo whose children were ‘disappeared’ by the Argentinian military dictatorship in the 1970s were initially dismissed as ‘crazy women’ who had little influence, and so were subjected only to arrests, rather than the imprisonment and torture experienced by many dissidents (Fisher 1989). The association of femininity with fragility and vulnerability enables women protesting under the banner of maternal identity to escape some of the violence directed at other protesters because they are not perceived as threatening to the same extent. The ‘maternal frame’ positions women’s activism “in the language and cultural themes of motherhood and appropriate activities for women” (Noonan 1995:92). Women’s roles as mothers and family members, characteristically identities that locate women within the private sphere, can prove to be the very thing that legitimates their entry into the public sphere of politics. Responsibility for the survival of the family and the cultural importance placed upon motherhood politicises maternal identity, producing a hybrid identity of the ‘supermadre’, or ‘supermother’ (Laurie 2011). Its efficacy lies in the fact that it enables women to “project a traditional, domestic and therefore politically ‘safe’ femininity, while at the same time opening up the space for seemingly non-traditional forms of behaviour and activities” (Laurie 2011:179).

Yet for many young women, motherhood is an increasingly distant or unlikely prospect as extended youth transitions, increased time spent in education, insecure employment and the inaccessibility of the housing market delay or rule out the decision to have children (Andres and Wyn 2010; Jamieson et al 2012; Ní Bhrolcháin and Beaujouan 2013). Furthermore essentialist notions of femininity and women’s nurturing role are potentially restrictive and limiting, and as such there is a definite need for research that considers gendered aspects of young women’s activist
mobilisation and engagement other than motherhood (as I do in Chapter 7). Just as
gender neutral analyses of social movements render invisible women’s experiences of
activism, so too is it unwise to ignore the role of age within women’s social movement
participation. However, as the next section demonstrates, there is a relative lack of
research that attends specifically to young women’s activism.

**Young women’s social movement activism**
The specific position that young women occupy within contemporary Western
societies under regimes of neoliberalism and postfeminism is such that it is no longer
(as if it ever was) sufficient to study female activists as a homogenous group. Rather,
an examination of the specific lived experiences of young female activists provides an
insight into the potential for resistance to the mentality of governance that
neoliberalism represents (Rose 1992:145). Furthermore, where “the binary hierarchies
of public/private, active/passive, and masculine/feminine combine with a set of
institutional practices to obscure and exclude the political agendas and practices of
women and girls” (Taft 2011:91) it is crucial to work to rectify this invisibility. To attend
to young women’s experiences of politics and agency is to undertake a fundamentally
feminist project in line with Taylor’s (1998) determination that “the goal of those who
advocate feminist research is to make women’s experiences visible, render them
important, and use them to correct distortions from previous empirical research and
theoretical assumptions that fail to recognize the centrality of gender to social life”

In her extensive study of ‘girl activists’ in five countries across the Americas, Jessica
Taft (2011) has produced one of the most comprehensive accounts of the meanings
that young women ascribe to their own politics and activism. Such studies are of
critical importance because it remains the case that girls and young women “are rarely
considered and written about as significant political actors. They appear [in academic
accounts] but they do not speak” (Taft 2011:4). As such, and in combination with
proclamations of young women’s political apathy, a discourse of exceptionalism
operates to render young women’s activism invisible. Age plays an important role here
because, as Taft (2011) describes, “in constructing their activist identities, girl activists
weave together a variety of discourses on gender, age and generation” (2011:8).
Furthermore, Taft’s study has highlighted the significance of collective identities for young women’s political engagement, in particular the sense that “being an activist meant they were part of something bigger than themselves – that they were part of a movement, part of an organisation, or part of a collective that was trying to create social change together” (Taft 2011:41).

For Kennelly (2014) young women’s social movement activism is inextricably tied up with the pressures they experience as neoliberal subjects. By examining young women’s emotional accounts of activist work she identifies the ways in which their relationship to retraditionalised gender identities under neoliberalism sees them overburdened. As successful subjects of neoliberalism’s internalisation of responsibility, the young female global justice activists Kennelly studied experienced their activism not as resulting from rational or abstract ideological commitments but from “a deeply felt sense of responsibility, inflected with powerful emotions including guilt, despair, and suffering” (Kennelly 2014:246). The emotional aspect of activism is the focus of my analysis of women’s politics and citizenship in Chapter 9 and contributes to the important discussion that Kennelly has started. Critically, by examining the extent to which contemporary gender regimes shape the gendered nature of activist work, and by exploring how the gendered division of labour impacts on the sustainability of activist commitments, Kennelly (2014) emphasises how the study of young women’s social movement experiences benefits both feminist and social movement theory. For this to occur it is important that research attends to the existing subject positions available to young women, and explores the ways in which their participation in activist politics enables them to resist and remake their gendered subjectivity. As such I now consider the significance of subjectivity and agency for these understandings.

**Young women’s gendered subjectivity and political agency**

In order to effectively comprehend the motivations for and experiences of social movement activism, and in particular the ways in which these represent new ways of engaging with and reworking existing understandings of gender and politics, it is necessary to attend to young women’s gendered subjectivity and political agency. Subjectivity is a contested concept that is subject to grand theoretical and
philosophical debates (e.g. Barrotta and Dascal 2005; Carr 1999; Mansfield 2000). Vacchelli (2011) identifies that Italian and Francophone feminist approaches emphasise embodied understandings of subjectivity (e.g. Braidotti 1992; Cavarero 2000), while Anglo-American theories situate the construction of subjectivity within the linguistic and discursive realm (e.g. Butler 1997). Whetherall (2008), meanwhile, is concerned with what she sees as a tendency to construct subjectivity in opposition to identity, whereby the latter is conceived as psychic and internal in contrast to “publicly available ‘identity’” (2008:78). Subjectivity thus risks becoming privatized and individualized. Yet current sociological and feminist interest in subjectivity emphasises the social and relational construction of understandings of the self (Gill 2008; Hollway 1998; Vacchelli 2011) and as such subjectivity is comprehended in relation to, rather than in opposition to, identity. For Hollway (1998) subjectivity addresses “the meanings and incorporated values which attach to a person’s practices and provide the powers through which he or she can position him- or herself in relation to others” (1998:227). Therefore Whetherall’s (2008) reading of Venn (2006) as asserting that “it is ‘subjectivity’ that makes it possible for any particular social identity to be lived either thoroughly or ambivalently, while ‘identity’ helps specify what there is to be lived” (Wetherall 2008:75-76) is not problematic but productive. It represents not an opposition of identity and subjectivity but an integration as a means of effectively conceiving the self in its personal and private constructions whilst remaining soundly rooted in the social.

Consequently my concern here is with the social and relational construction and comprehension of gendered subjectivity by young women who are discursively positioned by neoliberal postfeminist discourses as ‘top-girls’ (McRobbie 2007) and ‘can-do girls’ (Harris 2004a). I intend to demonstrate the ways in which political agency enables resistance to postfeminist and neoliberal ideologies through the construction of oppositional and dissident subjectivities as ‘wilful women’ that are at their heart feminist and relational. As Gill (2008) contends, “power and ideology operate through the construction of subjects, not through top-down imposition but through negotiation, mediation, resistance and articulation” (2008:439), thus subjectivity is continuously made and remade. Similarly, Taft (2011) has documented how “narratives about being (and not being) girls, youth and activists play an important role
in girl activists’ self-presentation and their conceptions of who they are both individually and collectively. Through narration, they produce themselves as particular kinds of subjects, drawing on and rejecting various widespread discourses of youth and of girlhood, reinforcing some common perceptions of their social groups, but challenging and redefining others” (2011:95). As such the circulation of subversive discourses within alternative political spaces of social movements has the potential to provide young female activists with discursive resources with which to resist the colonising force of neoliberalism and construct resistive gendered subjectivities.

Following Häkli and Kallio (2014), I contend that by effectively theorising political agency it is possible to broaden our understandings of what counts as politics, and that through subjectivity it is possible to “develop an understanding of political agency from the perspective of the lived reality of embedded social relations” (2014:188). Thus political participation, while studied here in the context of social movements, is not restricted to these spaces or to the processes of institutionalised politics as conceived within conventional political science. Rather political agency becomes comprehensible as “individual and collective, official and mundane, rational and affective, and human and non-human ways of acting, affecting and impacting politically” (Häkli and Kallio 2014:181). Further to this, and in contrast to the neoliberal postfeminist emphasis on individualism, this thesis is concerned with the social relations that inspire, influence, and impede political participation. As David Meyer (2000:47) contends, “developing agency as a moral and political actor is not an individual process but something that individuals do in the context of a larger community of struggle.” Social movements as forms of collective action necessitate an understanding of group, as well as individual, approaches to and motivations for, political participation. Thus this thesis seeks to explore the ways in which young women’s political agency is relational. That is, their capacity to act is informed and enabled by their relationships with others, as well as being exercised with and for a real or imagined community of actors.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an account of a variety of literature as it relates to the overall focus of the thesis, that is, to young women’s political participation in social movement activism. It began by situating the research within the neoliberal context of
late modernity in which declining structural influence and the rise of individualism have been argued to contribute to the detraditionalisation of gender. However, feminist writers have criticised such theories as inaccurately representing the shifting norms of gender, and have instead reconceptualised neoliberal and postfeminist influences as resulting in the retraditionalisation of gender and the creation of new gendered subjectivities for young women. Although these new subjectivities celebrate young women’s capacity for action they do so in a depoliticised, individualistic way that emphasises an acquiescent, consumption-based form of citizenship engagement that limits political participation. Concurrently, concerns surrounding a crisis of democracy have resulted in government-funded engagement programmes that seek to tackle young people’s civic and political disengagement and apathy. As such, young women are at once celebrated for their potential and chastised for their participation, or lack thereof. However, one of the recommendations of O’Toole et al (2003) for better understanding young people’s political engagement is to broaden conceptualisations of the political, and to eschew top-down survey methodologies that fail to attend to the lived realities of young people’s politics. As such, this chapter, and this thesis, has turned to consider the role of social movements as providing alternative spaces of youth politics, and in particular to consider young women’s place within them. Despite a long history of women’s invisibility within social movement theory, the application of a gender lens to social movements has brought into focus the various ways in which processes, organisations, objectives and outcomes of activism both inform, and are informed by, gendered norms and roles. Yet such studies have largely failed to integrate an analysis of age into their approaches, despite the significance of life stage in biographies of activism. Thus while young women are highly visible as ‘the ideal subjects of neoliberalism’, they remain relatively invisible within studies of social movement activism, necessitating research that brings together these two bodies of literature to understand how political participation through social movement activism enables a critical engagement with new gendered subjectivities. What follows does precisely that.

Chapter 3
Gendering the Social Movement Terrain of Anarchism and Environmentalism

Introduction

This chapter introduces anarchist and environmental social movements and considers their specific development as it is relevant to the UK context. In doing so it identifies some of the key areas in which gender informs and is informed by ideology, organisation and practice. It begins with an overview of the historical development of anarchism and assesses the contribution of anarchist theory to contemporary activist organising practices, before considering anarchism’s response to the ‘woman question’ in relation to the anarchafeminist organising of the Mujeres Libres. From here it sketches some of the issues that contemporary anarchafeminist activists are highlighting as areas of concern. The chapter then provides a brief overview of the historical development of environmentalism in the UK and the role of women within this. Key shifts in the 20th century are documented in relation to the impact on organisational strategies and the significance for the experiences of female activists is considered. The purpose of this chapter is to provide background information and context to the empirical discussions of anarchist and environmental activism that follow.

Charting the history of anarchism

Anarchism as a political philosophy is characterised by its opposition to all forms of dominance and hierarchy which it sees as the source of oppression. Although sometimes referred to as libertarianism, it is most accurate to consider it as ‘libertarian socialism’ as it combines a socialist critique of capitalism (the oppression of the working class through private ownership of the means of production by an elite) with a liberal critique of socialism in its favouring of individual liberty over the coercive powers of the state (Goodway 1989:1). Unlike socialism, which identifies capitalism as the source of oppression, anarchism sees domination as the inevitable result of any authoritarian system (Ackelsberg 1991:12) and as such seeks to create a society based on mutualism and consensus where hierarchical power structures do not exist.
Although some scholars have identified precursors to anarchism in Taoism and early Christianity (Marshall 1992; Woodcock 1962), anarchism is, for the most part, associated with the period of modernity; beginning in the late eighteenth century and declining with the start of the Second World War. Against the backdrop of the French Revolution and informed by the secular rationalist thought promoted by the Enlightenment, anarchism arose in response and opposition to the defining characteristics of the modern capitalist era, namely the growth of state power over private life, the emergence of the market, and spreading industrialisation. Although British anarchism can be traced back to authors such as William Godwin in the late 18th century, anarchism as a social movement remained relatively marginal in the UK in comparison to its prevalence in other countries (Marshall 2008:488). While British anarchists maintained a resolute opposition to parliamentary politics, in the late 19th century the labour movement under the Chartists became increasingly reformist at the expense of revolutionary ideals. Yet the anarchist movement in Britain reached what Marshall (2008:490) considers to be its zenith in the 1880s and 1890s due to the influence of large numbers of migrant workers and political refugees, including Jewish refugees, who had moved to the UK in the first half of the 19th century. The beginning of the 20th century saw major splits in the anarchist movement over support for and opposition to the First World War, until by 1924 “the anarchist movement in Britain was in disarray” (Marshall 2008:492). Despite the revival of interest in anarchist politics in light of the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s, anarchism as a social movement remained in the shadow of socialism’s influence on the radical Left. However, anarchism’s biggest legacy within the UK is in its influence on countercultural movements as a way of living rather than merely a system of beliefs (Marshall 2008:493). In particular it is anarchism’s theory of domination and its organisational response that is most relevant to much contemporary activism and which Richard Day (2005) identifies as characterising the practices of the newest social movements.

**Anarchist organisation and prefigurative politics**

During the 1860s and 1870s, antagonism grew between anarchists and Marxists in the International Working Men’s Association, a hugely influential coalition of trade union groups. Prior to this the two movements had shared very similar ideological principles
but for Mikhail Bakunin, a Russian revolutionary, the prevailing Marxist desire to replace the existing state with one that served the working classes was incompatible with anarchist aims. For Bakunin, an anarchist utopia necessitated the destruction of the state rather than the transference of its power; emancipation could not be delivered through the preservation of oppressive structures. This refusal to utilise oppressive means to achieve a non-oppressive end is an early example of the prefigurative politics upon which anarchist organising is based: the creation of embryonic forms of organisation and structures which will come to characterise the utopian future society. The popularity of such an approach has resulted in what Luchies (2014:111) has identified as “the spread of anarchistic politics across the radical Left.” In contrast to the centralisation and bureaucracy that characterises much socialist organising, anarchism promotes a decentralised, non-hierarchical, horizontal form of organising that promotes the creation of autonomous spaces, meaning that, as Brown (2011:204) explains, as a culture anarchism is “a rhizomatic lived experience that pops up everywhere”. Perhaps most significantly, anarchism’s influence can be observed in the activities of the alter-globalisation movement\(^1\) (Day 2005), which demonstrates its anarchist politics in its determination not to seize state power but a commitment to “exposing, delegitimizing and dismantling mechanisms of rule while winning ever-larger spaces of autonomy” (Graeber 2002:68).

**Anarchism and the woman question**

In many movements, the day to day struggles of participants go undocumented and this is no different within anarchism during the 19\(^{th}\) century. Accounts of the history of anarchism read like a report of the development of a political theory by white men: from Proudhon, through Mikhail Bakunin’s ‘collectivist anarchism’ to Leo Tolstoy’s espousal of non-violence, by way of Peter Kropotkin’s Darwin-inspired theory of ‘mutual aid’. Nonetheless, some of the most significant contributions to anarchist political theory, and to the development of the anarchist movement in North America, were made by Emma Goldman, a Russian émigré to New York whose writings on femininity and sexuality in the first half of the 20\(^{th}\) century proved instrumental in the

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\(^1\) Also known as the anti-globalisation movement and the global justice movement. ‘Alter-globalisation’ highlights the movement’s rejection of neoliberal globalisation policies which disadvantage the poorest and wreak environmental havoc, while embracing ideas of cosmopolitan citizenship, open borders and fair global trade that globalisation can enable.
theoretical integration of gender politics and anarchism, and the development of anarchafeminism.

Goldman’s writings were informed by her experience of anarchist activism in the United States but the spread of anarchism in the early 20th century was most notable in Russia, Spain and Latin America (in particular Mexico, Argentina and Uruguay). As an inherently revolutionary ideology, it was appropriate that anarchism’s biggest gains were made during the Russian and Spanish revolutions (Goodway 1989:1). In Russia, and in particular in the Ukraine, anarchism thrived from 1917 until it was suppressed by the Bolsheviks in 1921. In Spain, prior to Franco’s victory in 1939, anarchist doctrine was hugely popular, with strikes, abstention from voting and establishment of autonomous communes and villages widespread (Marshall 1992). It is Spain that provides the most pertinent example for this thesis of anarchafeminist activism in the 20th century.

The success of anarchism in 1930s Spain led to the emergence of Mujeres Libres, a movement of approximately 20,000 mainly working class women which existed from 1936 until the fall of Spain to fascism in 1939 (Ackelsberg 1991). Mujeres Libres, meaning ‘Free Women’, was founded as an autonomous women-only collective within the wider anarchist movement in response to recognition of women’s subordinated position both in Spanish society and within the anarchist movement itself (Ackelsberg 1991, 1985). Anarchist theory proposes that the working classes must take up the collective struggle, however the founders of Mujeres Libres recognised that equal participation in the revolution was not possible if women were not ‘ready’ to do so. Trade unions, in Spain as in many other countries, served as a primary politicising agent and were the main site of anarchist recruitment of workers. As a result it was men – who made up the majority of the workforce – who were most readily politicised. Women for the most part were excluded from the workforce, or where they did participate they were marginalised, with little access to union organising (for example, doing piece work at home, or working a double-shift in the lowest-paid factory jobs combined with domestic responsibilities). As such not only were women unlikely to be exposed to political debate and mobilisation activity but their exclusion from the public sphere was such that they lacked the basic knowledge and experience
that facilitated men’s participation within the movement. Thus the case of Mujeres Libres highlights the distinction between public and private spheres that impacts on women’s political agency, as identified in Chapter 2, and which will be analysed throughout this thesis.

Mujeres Libres identified the “triple enslavement of women to ignorance, to capital and to men” (Ackelsberg 1985:64) as central to women’s subordination and resolved to address these issues through the likes of educational programmes and consciousness-raising activities. However, the recognition by Mujeres Libres of the importance of organising separately was not shared by the wider trade union-based anarchist movement who believed that separate organising undermined non-hierarchical ideals and movement unity (Ackelsberg 1985:67). Furthermore, women’s concerns were regarded as marginal by the overwhelmingly male anarchist movement of the time. Nonetheless, the aim of Mujeres Libres’ organising was two-fold: to address women’s subordination in order to enable them to effectively engage in the revolutionary struggle, but also to tackle the sexist attitudes of male members of the movement who, while they argued for women’s equal treatment, were all too often unwilling to put this theory into practice in their own interactions. In spite of the anarchist commitment to equality and freedom from domination and oppression, and its overarching emphasis on prefigurative politics, as Ackelsberg notes, “the movement’s practice seemed ‘out of sync’ with its theory” (1985:76). A primary complaint about men within the movement from their female counterparts was their tendency to trivialise women’s issues and that women’s contributions to discussions were routinely ignored or ridiculed (Ackelsberg 1985:76). In spite of the passage of time, these problems continue to figure in women’s contemporary anarchist organising and I take the opportunity in Chapter 8 to explore the extent of this further.

Whether in explicitly anarchist collectives, or within the work of groups aligned to the alter-globalisation movement, the anarchist commitment to prefigurative politics remains strong, however, as Mujeres Libres found in the 1930s, the equal treatment of women, although espoused within anarchist theory, does not always occur in day-to-day organising. I now turn to outline some of the key contemporary criticisms of
sexism within the movement that are of relevance to the empirical discussions that are to follow.

**Men’s dominance**

Non-hierarchical organisational structures are such that anarchist meetings and discussion groups aim to be open to all participants to contribute equally, often through consensus-building and facilitation methods. However, as Beallor (2011) has noted this lack of formal structure can often have unintended consequences of perpetuating or reinforcing inequality because of subordinated groups’ inability to participate equally. So for example, men’s socialisation to dominate conversation and to seek leadership positions can result in women’s voices not being heard during discussions. While structurelessness can be desirable it should be recognised that the structures that anarchists see as oppressive can in fact serve to counteract existing privileges by supporting those less confident to participate fully (Beallor 2011:65). As Klito (2011:81) contends, “libertarians reproduce gender and sexual domination like everyone else [and] ignoring this phenomenon is the best way to make it worse.” The anti-oppressive pedagogic strategies being implemented to address this issue are discussed in Chapter 6.

**Women’s marginalisation**

In addition to the marginalisation of women’s voices as a result of men’s dominance in meetings, women’s issues are regularly side-lined, or dismissed as unimportant to the movement’s wider aims\(^2\). All too often there is a hierarchy of issues, with certain issues deemed relevant at the expense of others. Guest (2011:34), for example, identifies how violence against women is deemed “girls’ stuff” in contrast to the “real politics” of police brutality. The ‘gender’ of activities and issues determines the significance it is afforded: “too often issues are prioritised on the grounds of whether or not they make men feel heroic. Rioting does; shopping doesn’t” (Class War Federation 2011:60). So-called ‘women’s issues’ are neglected, regardless of their significance to wider issues of domination and oppression, and many within the anarchist movement are hostile to

\(^2\) It should be noted that this has tended to be a feature of politics, and Left politics, generally rather than an issue specific to the anarchist movement.
feminist critiques, despite “feminist literature [being] more relevant to the daily fight against oppression than much of the literature that anarchists read regularly” (Vandiver 2011:40). Rather than being fundamental to analyses of oppression, issues of ‘race’, gender and sexuality are all too often considered as “an optional extra for political analysis” rather than being inextricably linked (Class War Federation 2011:35). As with the Spanish anarchists of the 1930s, women’s issues continue to be viewed as a threat to the ‘unity’ of anarchist organising, rather than being fully incorporated into its analysis of power and domination. Chapter 8 explores this point more fully.

**Sexual abuse and harassment**

Anarchism’s interest in individual freedom and awareness of oppression is such that those who participate in the movement are at times at risk of believing themselves so enlightened that they are incapable of replicating oppressive behaviours. It is perhaps because of this the issue of sexual violence within the movement is currently so contentious. As Anarchist Feminists Nottingham (2011:309) lay out in their statement on intimate partner violence within activist communities, “there is an assumption that people who identify as activists will automatically treat each other with respect. We have found this to be untrue. In fact, this assumption actually serves to normalise and invisibilise unequal power dynamics and enable the denial of their existence to detrimental effects”.

Examples of this have been visible in the responses to incidents of sexual violence that have occurred within the Occupy movement’s camps, notably at Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Glasgow (Newcombe 2011; BBC news 2011). Where sexual violence has occurred, claims have been dismissed, victims have been discouraged from reporting the incident to the police, and it has been recommended that such issues be ‘dealt with internally’ to avoid undermining the movement (McKeown 2011). While sexual violence did not feature in my interviews with activists, discussion of such topics within online and independent media forums indicates the significance of the problem. Women’s full and productive participation in social movements, and in the anarchist movement in particular, is only possible when the spaces within which activism occurs are fully accessible, supportive and safe. In spite of the anarchist commitment to prefigurative politics and the elimination of oppression, the dominance of men within
the movement continues to replicate wider social structures of inequality. Rape and sexual violence serve to reinforce inequalities in gendered power while also resulting from them.

**The development of the environmental movement in the UK**

Environmental concerns around such issues as irrigation, deforestation and air pollution have occupied citizens throughout history wherever humanity has endeavoured to exert control over the natural world by means of agriculture and industry. The modern environmental movement as we know it, however, has a more recent lineage; the beginnings of which, as we have seen in the case of anarchism, can be identified as emerging in the wake of the Enlightenment and industrial revolution (Doherty 2002; McCormick 1989; Pepper 1996). For educated women of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries botany was considered to be a particularly suitable pastime, embodying the Enlightenment fascination with classifying the world while representing a respectable and improving leisure activity. Between 1760 and 1830 wealthy and educated women had good access to the field of study and held a degree of authority, including writing books on the subject. However, from the 1830s onwards, John Lindley, a respected botanist, led efforts to ‘defeminise’ and professionalise botany, resulting in a differentiation between specialists (men) and generalists (women) (Shtier 1997). Consequently women’s access to botanical research in the scientific sphere became limited and instead they were largely engaged in educating their children about flora or producing artistic representations of plants and flowers. As Shtier (1997:33) contends, “exclusionary practices of self-defining elites are a powerful part of the history of women and science”. We see here the emergence of public/private spheres discourse that situates appropriate activities for women within the private, domestic sphere of the home and thus excludes them from public and political life.

While attempts were made during the beginning of the twentieth century to facilitate international cooperation on environmental issues, it was not until after the Second World War that a growing awareness of the global scale of environmental degradation stimulated the emergence of modern environmentalism. The modern environmental
movement differed significantly from its conservationist precursor in relation to its appreciation of nature as a finite resource, the depletion of which effects humanity on a global, rather than a local, scale (Dobson 1995:34). Furthermore, the social and political context in which the movement emerged had a significant impact on its underlying ideology and organisational structures. In particular, the political radicalism and counter culture of 1960s were instrumental in the emergence of the radical environmental movement. The international scope of the New Left and its role in questioning political certainties in the wake of the Second World War through the promotion of grassroots democracy was visible in the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam war campaign, and student protests (Doherty 2002:33). In addition to their anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist ideologies, these protest movements were significant in their mobilisation of previously marginalised groups such as the young, women and ethnic minorities. While the momentum of the New Left diminished during the 1970s, its legacy lay in the New Social Movements (NSMs) which came to characterise radical politics in the second half of the 20th century. It was in this new political culture that the radical environmental movement emerged, alongside the Women’s Liberation Movement, the gay rights movement, and the peace and anti-nuclear movements. Consequently, NSMs were influenced not only by the legacy of the New Left but also by the ideologies and actions of each other (Doherty 2002:28). Notable groups that were founded during this period include Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth.

The eco-establishment

During the late 1970s and the 1980s, growing acknowledgement of the significance of environmental issues led to mainstream political parties attempting to incorporate an environmental awareness into their policies. While this development should have been welcomed as a sign of the efficacy of the campaigning undertaken by new environmental groups, Seager (1993), among others, has highlighted the detrimental effects to the movement that this co-option of environmental discourses has had. In this shifting political landscape, new environmental groups were no longer regarded as fringe groups with irrelevant concerns and as such began to be engaged with by politicians and legislators. Consequently, Seager (1993) argues, new environmental groups such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace underwent a process of
professionalisation and bureaucratisation that significantly affected their campaigning tactics and organisational structures.

Although many groups had been founded around non-hierarchical organising principles, engagement with formal politics saw them begin to reject such principles in favour of traditional and formalised organisational structures that mimicked those common within science and business (Seager 1993:10). While such transformations in institutional culture may have garnered respect and credibility from those within the political establishment, the domination of the environmental agenda by a new ‘eco-establishment’ had significant consequences for women’s participation (Seager 1993:10).

As Seager has documented, the decentralised organisation of the new environmental groups and women’s high levels of participation were by no means incidental. Women reported being particularly attracted to groups and organisations that eschewed masculinist hierarchies and as these groups formalised, so women felt less welcome within them (Seager 1993:176). Whereas new environmental groups had offered opportunities to engage in a form of ‘public service’ work, and enabled women to develop skills in areas such as fundraising and campaigning, the professionalisation process saw the eco-establishment increasingly recruiting from the spheres of business and marketing rather than from their own grassroots (Seager 1993:188). Furthermore, these groups undertook a move away from grassroots campaigning and education, towards a focus on more specialised areas of lobbying, research and litigation. The reduction in women’s opportunities to progress within environmental groups resulted in a stark division of labour whereby women are predominantly located at the lower end of the organisational structure, engaging in low-status, grassroots, voluntary or low-paid work. White, male privilege, meanwhile, became entrenched at the top of the hierarchy in such a way that a growing gap between grassroots members and those setting the environmental agenda has emerged (Seager 1993:187; Doherty 2002:132; Külcür 2012).

The move to more formal organisational structures has affected both women and minorities as their ability to influence policy has been diminished. With often little or no representation within the upper echelons of these groups, women and minorities
have struggled to have their concerns heard in a system which “privileges masculine values and priorities” (Seager 1993:186). Environmental campaigns are often indicative of this, with many groups prioritising conservation and wilderness issues above social justice and public health issues – such as chemicals and toxic waste – that most directly affect poor and marginalised members of society (Seager 1993:181; Külcür 2012). I explore the prioritisation of ‘women’s issues’ within the environmental movement in greater depth in Chapter 8. Of the 20 activists interviewed for this study, seven worked for NGOs that are broadly focused on environmental concerns. Thus an awareness of the issues that eco-establishment organisations pose for women’s participation is crucial. However, the environmental activism engaged in by participants was not limited to NGOs, necessitating a broader view of contemporary environmentalism. Partly in response to the professionalisation of new environmental groups and the growing gap between the eco-establishment and its grassroots, two notable movements came to prominence during the 1980s and 1990s: eco-feminism and environmental direct action (EDA).

**Eco-feminism**

Eco-feminism as a philosophy sought to reconnect gender and ecological issues in such a way that recognised the interlinked consequences of patriarchal society and emphasised the importance of situated knowledge for understanding environmental issues. Drawing on feminist standpoint theory, which posits that women’s experiences of oppression provide them with a unique view of the world, eco-feminism argues that women’s sense of being ‘closer to nature’ than men necessitates a gendered analysis of the causes and consequences of environmental degradation (Mellor 1997).

Women’s ‘affinity’ with nature has been differently interpreted within eco-feminism, with some women, in particular those whose eco-feminism incorporates forms of earth-based spirituality, arguing that women’s connection to the natural world is biologically determined through reproduction. Such a position, however, is theoretically problematic for many who see such arguments as essentialist and liable to be used to reinforce the gender binaries of culture/nature and mind/body upon which patriarchal oppression is founded (Evans 1993). For other eco-feminists, women’s connection to nature is not biological, but social and cultural: women do not
know the natural world better because of a shared ability to create and nurture life but because as the poorest members of all societies they are more vulnerable and attuned to environmental hazards. As such, women’s closeness to the environment provides a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of environmental damage on individuals and families. The relevance of ecofeminism to contemporary environmental activist identities is considered further in Chapter 8.

**Environmental direct action**

One of the most significant results of the professionalisation of the eco-establishment was the resulting absence of radical environmental activism. As new environmental groups became increasingly institutionalised so their capacity to undertake legally questionable action was diminished for fear that their assets could be seized and their credibility in the eyes of the political establishment could be compromised (Doherty 2002: 155). Environmental direct action (EDA) both as a tactic and a movement became established relatively late in the UK in comparison to the USA and Australia, and while activism in the latter countries focused mainly on ‘wilderness’ issues, EDA in the UK centred predominantly around the environmental impacts of road-building and quarrying (Doherty 2002:164). Despite its delayed beginnings, EDA in the UK quickly flourished, drawing on established social movement networks and practices that had been pioneered during the 1960s and 1970s. Its use of non-hierarchical, autonomous, collective and decentralised organising strategies owes a debt not only to anarchist philosophy and the embryonic environmental movement of the 1960s, but also to the UK’s feminist and anti-nuclear movements. Significantly for this thesis, EDA is the point at which the anarchist and environmental movements in the UK intersect, and as such many interviewees were involved in EDA to some extent.

The impetus for much EDA in the UK was the formation in 1991 of the UK branch of Earth First! (EF!), a radical, anarchic environmental protest group founded in the US in 1980. Although not a formal organisation of any kind, EF!’s promotion of autonomous direct action to bring about fundamental structural change in the name of environmental preservation led to many radical environmental protesters organising under the EF! banner. EDA flourished in the 1990s as its opposition to the Conservative
government’s road-building scheme came to define protest during the decade (Button et al 2001). Bringing together a wide coalition of activists from different sectors, including eco-establishment groups, local residents, new age travellers, squatters and experienced eco-radicals (North 1998), the anti-road building protests of the 1990s significantly altered the style of political protest and institutional responses to it (Button et al 2001). In the tradition of British social movements, EDA protest groups display little formal organisation, instead drawing participants from overlapping networks and deploying whichever tactics are deemed most appropriate (Doherty 2002:171; Button et al 2001). In addition to more traditional tactics such as petitions and legal challenges, EDA groups utilised semi-legal and illegal repertoires of activism including occupations, trespassing, vandalism and sabotage of road-building machinery – dubbed ‘ecotage’ or ‘monkeywrenching’. The creation of carnivalesque protest camps at sites such as Twyford Down in Hampshire where protesters occupied tree-houses and labyrinthine tunnel systems for significant periods of time drew sizeable media attention. Unlike with many previous protests, the diversity of the campaigners involved and the presence of environmental issues on government agendas made it difficult for powerful elites to label protesters negatively (Button et al 2001:27). EDA protest tactics and styles of organising continue to figure significantly in the UK environmental movement, with a series of ‘Camps for Climate Action’ protests (colloquially known as Climate Camps) in the 2000s, and more recently with the activism of groups including No Dash for Gas and Reclaim the Power.

The prevalence of activist-led training sessions around such issues as legal rights and media-awareness, and the production and distribution of situated knowledge within EDA (Button et al 2001) would suggest that the movement has successfully avoided some of the difficulties the eco-establishment faced in attracting women, however other evidence suggests that the movement is not as female-friendly as it would often like to believe. For Seager (1993), deep-ecology groups of the likes of EF! sustain an unhealthily macho movement environment. Their unwillingness to incorporate a gender analysis of ecological issues, and their refusal to acknowledge the debt owed to feminist organising in influencing “co-operative, non-invasive, and holistic” philosophies (Seager 1993:230) is symptomatic of a wider masculinist culture. In this respect, EDA experiences similar problems to the anarchist movement, and the
significance of ‘macho direct action’ is discussed in relation to both movements in Chapters 6 and 8.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of the development of anarchist and environmental social movements within the context of the UK, and with reference to the status and experiences of women. The discussion has been characterised by a public/private divide and it has emphasised the difficulties women face in being taken seriously within social movement organisations when ‘women’s issues’ are marginalised. The environmental movement’s beginnings in botany and the study of the natural world was such that at an early stage women’s participation was considered a respectable past-time. However, with the formalisation of the subject and the introduction of scientific methods, women’s participation became problematic for male elites who sought to establish the field as a credible scientific pursuit. While a number of women throughout the Victorian period were engaged in public environmental activity (including Octavia Hill who co-founded what would become the National Trust), for the most part, the performance of respectable femininity within the private sphere continued to limit their contributions to the early stages of environmentalism. The later formalisation of previously radical environmental organisations once again segregated women by concentrating them in grassroots, voluntary roles and largely excluding them from public, strategic, decision-making roles. The gendered nature of community work sees it conceptualised as an extension of the domestic and familial realm and therefore as a particularly suitable space for women’s activity (Brownill 2004; Gosling 2008; Grimshaw 2011).

In contrast to environmentalism, anarchist philosophy has critiqued the manifestation of domination in all its forms and as such has largely welcomed female activists as comrades. The likes of Emma Goldman, Voltairine de Cleyre and Lucy Parsons were prominent writers and speakers whose work informed later anarchafeminist activists. Anarchafeminist organising by Mujeres Libres in 1930s Spain served as a further public example of women’s anarchist activism, but was designed to tackle problems of women’s marginalisation that continue to exist within androcentric anarchist groups and macho EDA activism. The significance of the public/private divide for women’s
activism and political participation, the marginalisation of ‘women’s issues’, and the role of structure in facilitating or limiting women’s political agency are all addressed in the forthcoming chapters.
Chapter 4
Researching Young Women and Activism: A Methodological Approach

Introduction
This chapter provides a reflexive account of the methodological approach to this research project. It begins by detailing the epistemological perspective and feminist commitment that have guided my study of young women’s activism, before outlining the development of four research questions that the study set out to answer. The selection of interviews and participant observation as methods of data collection is discussed in relation to my own activist identity. An explanation of sampling and recruitment procedures is provided, as well as a brief overview of the characteristics of the interview sample. The ethical considerations made in relation to the study of social movement activism are outlined, before the process of data analysis is described. The chapter concludes with a brief examination of the issues of quality and rigour in relation to qualitative research.

Epistemology and Methodology
While methodological literature often emphasises the dualism of inductivism and deductivism, Stanley and Wise (1990), amongst others, have contended that this opposition is oversimplified and as such carries no experiential validity (1990:22). While deductive epistemologies have rightly been critiqued for proposing that the social world is a coherent whole that can be accurately measured by an appropriately objective and impartial (male) researcher, the assumption that an inductive approach is possible is equally naive as “researchers cannot have ‘empty heads’ in the way that inductivism proposes” (Stanley and Wise 1990:22). Instead researchers’ understandings of the social world they are studying should be acknowledged as “temporally, intellectually, politically and emotionally grounded” (1990:22) and as such analyses and the theories that develop from them should be considered as contextually specific as the experiences of those that they study. Furthermore, it is necessary to view the research process as a means of socially constructing the world that is informed by the subjectivity and situatedness of the researcher themselves (Steier 1991).
As Ramazanoğlu (2002:1) has elucidated, “decisions about methodology are particularly powerful in the politics and practices of knowledge production.” This is especially pertinent when designing a non-sexist feminist research project. Feminist theory since the 1970s has consistently challenged traditional research paradigms and sought to expose the androcentric and patriarchal interests that they have served (Benton and Craib 2001; Fonow and Cook 1991). For early feminist theorists the post-hoc inclusion of gender into established theoretical frameworks and research methodologies proved to be an insufficient means of addressing women’s marginalisation and they instead sought to establish new perspectives which challenged the very structures of knowledge production that characterised scientific inquiry (Smith 1987:85). The scientific tradition, with its roots in Enlightenment ideals of rationality and objectivity, has been viewed as an ideological means of legitimising male power and dominance; the reliance on Cartesian dualisms that contrast rational, objective man with irrational, subjective woman established male knowledge as superior to female experience (Benton and Craib 2001). Consequently, experience has been sublimated in the scientific paradigm in favour of theory, and the notion that with the appropriate methods data that is untainted by subjective values and beliefs can be collected has dominated social research (Stanley and Wise 1983:154).

While there is no single feminist epistemology, methodology or method (Crotty 1998:160), attempts have been made to identify the commonalities shared by feminist research and to develop guiding principles of feminist methodology (Fonow and Cook 2005:2213). For Gottfied (1996) this may be as simple as the notion that “feminism as method sees the representation of women’s experience as the beginning and often the end of the production of knowledge claims” (1996:5). In the case of Fonow and Cook’s influential work, the guiding principles were: (1) a conscious and reflexive attendance to the significance of gender as a fundamental structuring factor in social life; (2) the role of consciousness-raising as a methodological tool; (3) a challenge to the supremacy of objectivity in social research through the celebration of subjective experience as constructing knowledge; (4) attendance to the potentially exploitative nature of the research process and a commitment to ethical practice; (5) a commitment to empowering women by using research to challenge and transform patriarchal institutions (Fonow and Cook 2005:2213).
In her account of deploying a feminist methodological approach to the study of social movements, Taylor (1998) contends that the acknowledgement of gender as an analytic category facilitates the development of social movement theory by illuminating areas of relevance that pertain to the cultural, emotional and subjective aspects of contention and activism that rationalist or cognitive approaches have not acknowledged. Furthermore, studying social movements using feminist methodologies also contributes to and strengthens feminist theory by offering more complex interpretations of women’s lived experiences than feminist or social movement theory can provide alone. In doing so, Taylor (1998) describes five features of feminist methodology to which my own research subscribes: a focus on gender and inequality; an attempt to understand and give voice to the experiences of marginalised groups; the use of participatory methods; a commitment to social action; and an epistemological assumption of reflexivity. By considering young women’s gendered experiences of social movement activism this research highlights issues of gender inequality within political spheres, in particular within the day-to-day functioning of movements and in doing so it gives voice to a group that as young and female has previously been largely ignored by researchers of social movements and political behaviour in favour of the abstract male subject (highlighted in Chapter 2). In-depth and open-ended interviews, solicited diaries and participant observation were selected as appropriate methods by which to “break down the false separation and hierarchy between the researcher and the researched” (Taylor 1998:370). I intend to feed my findings and theories back into the movements from which my participants and I drew our experiences in the hope that this will provoke discussion and action on some of the issues raised. My intent as an activist and as a researcher is to provide analysis of activist cultures and actions which will ultimately lead to the strengthening of movements and improved experiences for women within them. Finally, the centrality of reflexivity to feminist research practice figures heavily in this project through an acknowledgement of my own situatedness, a critical reflection of how this has shaped my interactions with individuals and sites of research, and the subsequent knowledge produced.

**Reflexivity**
While positivist researchers concern themselves with issues of validity and objectivity, the feminist methodological approach that this research takes emphasises instead the importance of transparency and reflexivity, acknowledging and exposing the centrality of the researcher to the collection and co-creation of data. Qualitative approaches to research may eschew the central aim of objectivity that is at the heart of much quantitative research by attending to the ways in which research participants construct their own realities, but care must still be taken to ensure that this commitment does not obfuscate the biases that can occur during the analytical process through the privileging of certain information because it corresponds with the researcher’s own experiences. As Gergen and Gergen (1991) illuminate, “our stories form a ‘forestructure of understanding’ out of which we make sense of the world and thus, in an important sense, determine what we find interesting, exciting, enchanting or forbidding” (1991:89). The acceptance of the role of the author of research in the construction of knowledge suggests that to a greater or lesser extent, all knowledge production is in part autobiographical and should therefore be openly acknowledged as such (Söderqvist 1991:148). In light of critiques regarding the applicability of traditional measures of validity to qualitative research, “reflexivity becomes important to demonstrate one’s awareness of the research problematics and is often used to potentially validate and legitimize the research precisely by raising questions about the research process” (Pillow 2003:179).

Feminist research which seeks to minimise the potentially exploitative power relationships in research and establish a research relationship with participants that is based on respect and empathy, necessarily needs to adopt a commitment to reflexivity that explicates the consequences of the researcher’s own experiences and biases (Oakley 1981, 1999). As Scriven (1972:99) has commented, “for social scientists to refuse to treat their own behaviour as data from which one can learn is really tragic.” Furthermore, reflexive research practice has applications beyond the management of power relations, not least in increasing the quality of research. Readers and audiences are much better able to establish the confirmability of research findings if they are accompanied by a reflexive account of the author’s own biographical perspective and the impact that their presence within the research setting is believed to have had (Seale 1999:26). Additionally, the provision of a fully reflexive account of decisions
made regarding methodology, data analysis and interpretation improves the capacity for replication by other researchers and consequently improves the quality and dependability of qualitative research (Seale 1999:147). As such I have aimed in this chapter and throughout to be as explicit as possible about my own motivations, perspectives and circumstances and to critically reflect on the influence this has had on my collection and interpretation of data.

As part of this commitment it is worth establishing that although I refer to myself as an activist here, this was ultimately an identity that I only became truly comfortable with in the course of the research. Having been active in feminist campaigning during my undergraduate study, the groups I had worked with gradually disbanded and dispersed and during a year of full-time shift work and then my Master’s study, the pressures of work inevitably took over. My lack of direct engagement with pressing social and political issues bothered me during this period of ‘drifting’ but health problems and confidence prevented me from seeking out groups to work with. Undertaking research on anarchist and environmental activism was the push that I needed to begin participating with these groups and while my involvement has broadened and my commitment deepened, I nevertheless entered this space as a researcher. My identity as a researcher was not what provided me with access to these movements rather it was the protective façade that I needed in order to project the necessary confidence to meet and work with so many unknown people. It was an academic obligation that enabled me to align my actions with my ideology.

Divinski et al (1994:7) have defined activist academics as "academics who attempt to integrate their academic and activist identities" and thus, as Milan and Hintz (2010) reflect in their analysis of researching activist communities, “studying activism, and in particular radical activists, implies a process of redefinition of the self by the researcher” (2010:841). Central to the success of this approach is a commitment to reflexivity as “a central dimension of the process” (Milan and Hintz 2010:841). Petray (2012:555) also emphasises the importance of ensuring that the research produced from the study of activist cultures contributes to the strengthening of movements through better understanding of movement dynamics. In order for this to occur the findings and theories produced need to be accessible to social movement actors, both
in language and form. While all of my interviewees have a minimum of undergraduate level university education, the academic publishing system is such that, in spite of recent open access models, the majority of academic output remains barricaded behind expensive paywalls and so is not easily accessible. For this reason I intend to produce a zine summarising some of the key findings of my research that will be made available electronically for activists and interested parties to read.

**Research questions**

In taking an inductive approach to this research I began not with a hypothesis that needed testing but with a general interest in young women’s activism. In particular, I was interested in challenging the relative invisibility of young women’s radical political participation that I felt resulted from the intersecting inequalities of age and gender. I wanted to make young women’s activism visible and to move the debate away from the eternal question of young women’s supposed political apathy towards a more fruitful exploration of how those that are politically active experience their activism. In the context of the contemporary feminist movement I knew they were there because I had seen them, worked with them, studied them, and been them, and I knew that they existed beyond these spaces. Selecting anarchism and environmentalism as the social movements of study was both a conscious and an ultimately arbitrary decision. While I justify my choice of these movements on their current social and political relevance, and on the basis of their specific organisational and political traditions, similar justifications could have been made for any number of other movements. Nonetheless, reading the literature and determining what was already known and what was lacking led me to develop areas of interest and specific research questions that I felt this study should be able to provide some tentative answers to. After considerable honing, the research questions that informed my research design and data collection were:

- How do young women narrate their experiences of ‘coming to politics’ and formulating political agency?
- What form does their social movement participation take?
- How do the gender regimes of different social movements affect young women’s participation in them?
How does women’s political agency inform their gender identity and performance?

Methods

Chamberlayne et al (2000) have identified how an increased interest in the personal and social meanings that individuals ascribe to their actions and experiences has resulted in a paradigm shift within qualitative social research that has produced a ‘turn to biographical methods’ such as life history interviews and (auto)biography. The underlying ontological assumption of such biographical methods – that “individuals have agency, that biographies make society and are not merely made by it” (Rustin 2000:46) – corresponds to the theoretical approach to subjectivity, adopted in this research, that subjectivity is both constituted and constitutive.

Interviews were chosen as one method of data collection because they allow for the production of selfhood via the narration of personal experience (Harding 2006:2.4). Although not the entire focus of the research, I was particularly interested in young women’s narratives of ‘coming to’ and ‘doing’ politics. Narratives are valuable in this context because they situate people’s identities and experiences as complex composites that are contextually constructed and open to change (Taylor and Littleton 2006:23). The telling of a life through multiple narratives allows for the recognition of the influence of numerous and competing discourses on an individual’s subjectivity. The narration of an individual’s biography is rarely chronological and wholly coherent (Harding 2006:1.2) and yet it demonstrates that inconsistencies in identity are not intolerable (Taylor and Littleton 2006:26). For Harding (2006) the real value of narratives in interviews is their use of the present as “a crucial reference point for attempts to remember the past” (2006:1.2).

In the interviews I adopted a subject-orientated approach (Harding 2006:3.10) – that is, my questioning focused on specific biographical areas of political socialisation and activism rather than attempting to document the interviewee’s entire life history. For these questions I used a narrative style of questioning in order to elicit participants’ stories rather than asking ‘explanatory questions’ which are more likely to result in the interviewee offering “conventional discursive justifications” (Hollway and Jefferson...
Questions were formulated to be open and elicit narratives, such as “can you tell me a little about...” or “do you remember a time when...” and participants were given ample space to answer, with minimal interruption on my part. Interviews averaged an hour in length and covered a range of topics, asking about experiences at a range of different life stages through childhood and adolescence to adulthood. Interviews were conducted in person or via Skype, and were recorded using a Dictaphone, then transcribed verbatim. The location of interviews was chosen on the basis of mutual convenience, and wherever possible I tried to conduct interviews in person as I felt this better facilitated the development of a rapport with individual interviewees, as well as providing important contextual visual data relating to appearance. However, time pressures for both me and my interviewees were such that 9 of the 20 interviews were conducted via Skype. Of these I had previously met 3 of my participants in other activist situations.

To complement the interviews I had envisioned solicited diaries as a useful tool to collect information that was otherwise unobservable, in particular the mundane day to day activist activities of participants that are undertaken alone or in private settings. I had speculated that diaries held the potential to construct participants as active producers in the research process by enabling them to both record and reflect on their own experiences (Elliot 1997:2.7) which would be methodologically consistent with the feminist epistemology that underpinned the project. Furthermore, I believed diaries would be particularly suited to the young women of my sample. As Elliot (1997:4.3) has attested, some people are more familiar with recording daily life than others and young women’s prolific use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and their participation in activities such as ‘blogging’ and zine-production for both personal and political purposes (see, for example, Harris 2001 and 2008; Piepmeier 2009; Redfern and Aune 2010) suggested that they were adept at publicly documenting their thoughts and experiences.

Unfortunately the diary aspect of data collection proved to be largely unsuccessful, suffering from both a low rate of uptake and a high rate of discontinuation. In total I received three completed diaries and so had to rethink my approach to data collection. I had attended a number of events with the intention of publicising my research and
recruiting participants for interviews and had made notes of my general impressions of these events. As it became apparent that the diary method was not progressing as I had hoped, I began to review these notes and observations and reflected on their status as potential data. Having originally ruled participant observation out as a method for this study in favour of diaries (seeing them as a more reliable way to gain insight onto the day-to-day activities and organisational cultures of activist groups) it was fortuitous that ultimately my desire to participate in rather than just listen to stories of activism had positioned me as a participant observer.

In her study of women’s political activism at Greenham Common, Sasha Roseneil engaged in a process of retrospective auto-ethnography (Roseneil 1993) whereby she drew on and documented her own experiences as an activist at the peace camp during the 1980s. As a teenage activist “untrained and uninterested in the niceties of sociological research methods” (1995:7) she did not collect data during her time at the camp but instead later interrogated and analysed her memories and reconstructions, synthesising these with data from interviews with other activists and documentary sources. As such my own experiences as an activist during the beginning of this study served as a source of data that could be analysed retrospectively, despite not having considered myself to be collecting observational data to begin with. On deciding to conduct participant observation for the remainder of the study, I wrote detailed field notes reflecting on my experiences and observations. My selection of what to document was in part informed by the themes that had emerged from the initial interviews, with a view to documenting how these events and interactions occur in context. I also wrote to describe settings and scenes in order to record the atmosphere and layout of events, and noted anything unusual or surprising that drew my attention. For the most part these notes were made once I had returned home because I did not want to produce anything that could be confiscated by police and used as evidence against the activists I was studying. As Walsh (2012:256) explains, the quality of field notes is related to how immediately they are written, yet “the note-taking has to fit with the requirements of the setting under study.”

As a young woman in my mid-twenties participating in activism that could be variously characterised as anarchist and environmental, my own experiences and reflections of
“the situation at hand” (Fonow and Cook 1991) stand in for those that would otherwise have been collected from others using diaries. Self-evidently this presents several methodological issues, including reliability and critical distance. The substitution of multiple accounts of activist experiences with a single one is by no means ideal but while the breadth of experiences documented is narrower, they are nonetheless triangulated with both the existing literature and the accounts elicited through interviews.

While I have utilised two of the key methods commonly deployed by ethnographers – interviews and participant observation – I am inclined to avoid describing the research presented here as an ethnography. Although the field of ethnographic research is broad and diffuse, and not all ethnographies are equal in their approach, extent or success, it remains true that ethnography specifies a particular methodological approach to research that requires lengthy emersion in a field. An ethnography is a piece of writing that documents and describes a culture, a feat which I do not believe my study truly achieves and nor did it set out to. By focusing on a very narrow aspect of social movements, that of young women’s views and experiences of activism, I am not able to provide an overview of a particular movement’s culture worthy of the ethnographic label. Rather I can provide an insight into the ways in which the young women I have studied perceive and construct their gendered subjectivities and political agency within the context of social movement activism.

**Sampling and Access**

**Interview sampling**

A rigorously formulated and fully transparent sampling strategy is an essential foundation for sound social research (Marshall and Rossman 2006:64; Devine and Heath 1999:11). However quantitative researchers have been noted as more readily explicating their sampling procedures than their qualitative colleagues (Devine and Heath 1999:13). Sampling for qualitative research reflects the paradigm’s naturalistic approach and as such the researcher selects a sample based not on the criteria of probability (as sought in quantitative research through the use of random sampling) but on the specific attributes that they seek to study (Marshall 1996). The use of a purposive sampling technique within qualitative research enables the selection of
participants whose experiences or social position provide the best insight into the areas set out in the research questions (Marshall 1996).

The criteria for my interview sample were relatively broad and relied predominantly on participants’ own self-identification as young women who were engaged in anarchist or environmental activism as I did not feel it was my place to police others’ gender identities or activist commitment. Defining ‘young’ in the context of this research was a more complicated process and my original age range of 18-30 increased to 18-35 due to difficulties recruiting participants. Youth is, of course, an ambiguous and culturally constructed category that serves political as much as descriptive purposes, as Chapter 2 has demonstrated. Even an organisation as large and bureaucratic as the United Nations does not have a single age range by which it categorises youth, with different UN entities variously defining youth as 15-24, 15-32 and 15-35 (United Nations Department of Economic Affairs, nd). The lower limit of my age range was set at 18 in order to avoid the specific ethical issues that apply to research conducted with young people who are legally considered as children. The upper age limit of 30 increased after two women over 30 expressed interest in being interviewed. If they considered themselves as young women, I decided, then what place of mine was it to inform them otherwise? With increasing life expectancy, extended youth transitions, increased periods of education and the reduction in state support of those considered ‘young’, 35 did not seem an unreasonable age to include in my study.

Participant recruitment began using a site-based approach which identified email lists and discussion groups used by social movement groups. The administrators of such groups were emailed explaining the nature of the research and asking them to forward to the group the request for participants. The use of site-based approaches has been identified by Arcury and Quandt (1999) as particularly useful when communities are complex and amorphous, without a single overarching structure and as such, I believed, should have been well suited to researching social movements. The successful use of a similar approach during my work as a researcher on Redfern and Aune’s (2010) study of contemporary feminist activism supported this view. However

3 In 2012 the Coalition government, for example, raised the age at which they consider individuals to be ‘adults’ and therefore in need of housing benefit that covers more than the single accommodation allowance from 25 to 35.
this recruitment method proved not to be as effective as hoped as it did not adequately acknowledge the security culture and suspicion of outsiders that exists within large parts of these movements (see, for example, ActivistSecurity.org 2008). The timing of this research coincided with renewed revelations about the extent of undercover police spying within activist groups. The exposé of Mark Kennedy in 2011 as the undercover police officer whose infiltration of a group of climate activists in Nottingham resulted in their arrest, trial, and subsequent acquittal received extensive media coverage and reignited debates over the police’s long history of undercover policing of protest movements (Lubbers 2012; Evans and Lewis 2013). While in some contexts academic status may elicit trust from potential participants, this is not the case amongst activists, not least because one former police spy, Bob Lambert, is now a lecturer at St Andrews University and London Metropolitan University. Furthermore, in 2013 the Guardian exposed a plot by Cambridgeshire Police to have a student infiltrate and report back on left-wing activist groups at the University of Cambridge (Evans and Khalili 2013).

Consequently, while a purposive sampling technique was proposed, the practicalities of research necessitated a flexible and pragmatic approach to sampling (Marshall 1996:524). Having failed to reach my desired sample size through site-based recruitment I began to snowball sample from women I had already interviewed and contacts I had made through my activism. I put out calls for participants through Twitter and Facebook, and in a couple of cases approached individuals directly having read articles or blog posts they had written. The tendency for any sample accessed using a snowballing technique to share community connections and therefore potentially a degree of homogeneity of views and experiences makes such a process less than ideal for accessing ‘isolates’ – members of movements who engage only on the peripheries or are newer members without network connections (Atkinson and Flint 2001). However, in light of the security culture and degree of suspicion within activist communities the conferral of trusted status by existing interviewees in their recommendations of new participants became crucial to reaching a minimum sample size that would provide sufficient variety in experience, as indicated by data saturation.
Table 1 details the age, ethnicity and sexuality (as described in their own terms) of participants for reference, as well as a rough categorisation of their predominant social movement participation. An asterisk marking names indicates participants who completed diaries. I have not provided more detailed profiles of my interviewees out of concern that they would be too easily identified.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>Activist Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Bi</td>
<td>Environmental/Anarchist</td>
</tr>
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<td>White British</td>
<td>Lesbian/queer</td>
<td>Environmental/Anarchist</td>
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<td>Not really sure</td>
<td>Anarchist</td>
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<td>Queer</td>
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<td>Megan*</td>
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<td>White British</td>
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<td>Naomi</td>
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<td>Ruth</td>
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<td>Simone</td>
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<td>Su</td>
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<td>Bicurious</td>
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<td>Zoe*</td>
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<td>White British</td>
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<td>Environmental/Anarchist</td>
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Participant observation sampling

Although it involves selecting appropriate sites or events to observe rather than individual people to talk to, participant observation requires a process of sampling as much as any other research method. Transparency regarding sampling strategies ultimately informs the claims that can be made regarding the data collected (Devine and Heath 1999:14) and so throughout this thesis I will make clear where possible my reasons for attending and collecting data at specific events. In some cases I attended events as a result of my own activist activities while others were identified specifically as potential recruitment sites but most served both functions. In the case of events I was not already attending, I identified suitable and relevant events using a range of criteria which included: whether the political scope of the event aligned with anarchism or environmentalism; whether it was likely to attract younger people and whether any of these were likely to be women; whether the events were public and therefore easy for me to access as an outsider. I began identifying events through web searches and by following links from websites of groups I had already approached as part of my interviewee recruitment, keeping a spreadsheet of relevant details; others I heard about through word of mouth, often whist at other events or from women I was interviewing.

The decisions I made about which events to actually attend were less theoretically-informed and were instead the result of the more mundane and pragmatic considerations that inform the research process (Foster 2006:79). Specifically I needed to be able to answer some of the following questions in the affirmative: Is it on a day when I’m not working? Is it easy to get to by train? Do I currently have any money to spare? Do I know anyone who is going? Through my membership of a campaigning group, as an individual activist and as a researcher I attended a wide range of events which ranged in focus and format, from individual campaign planning meetings to a large environmental protest camp, taking in talks, workshops and film-screenings as
well as the more obvious ‘activism’ of demonstrations and marches. In total I estimate that I spend approximately 200 hours as a participant observer in the field.

**Participant observation roles**

Field researchers have long discussed the different roles that participant observers take on during the process of data collection, and the different perspectives these provide (e.g. Gold 1958; Junker 1960; Jorgensen 1989). While Gold (1958) conflates the complete-participant role with covert observation, I did not enter the field in this role and so did not inhabit it for the purpose of deception. Rather, I moved from a participant-as-observer role to a complete-participant role in moments of heightened emotion or stress. As an example, I acted as a legal observer at a protest camp and at one point there was a stand-off between protesters and police, with the police shouting and threatening the protesters, including one of my friends, with arrest. At this moment I was already struggling to maintain my independence as a legal observer due to concern for my friend’s wellbeing and so any sense of my role as a researcher disappeared. Nonetheless, it is an inescapable fact that I would not have been in that situation had I not used my research as a way of becoming involved in activism.

Spicker’s identification of disclosure as a spectrum of activity (2011:119) points towards the value of a dynamic framework for identifying the relative transparency of the researcher’s identity at different points during the process of fieldwork. This idea is also employed by McCurdy and Uldam (2014) in their proposition of a reflexive ‘quadrant’ that combines the researcher’s position on the covert/overt spectrum within their similarly flexible insider/outsider status. Drawing on their own experiences of researching social movements, McCurdy and Uldam (2014) discuss the multiple structural and identity factors that serve to establish the researcher at specific points on the insider/outsider spectrum in the course of their research, highlighting the relevance of nationality, social class and ideology in their experiences but also emphasising how the researcher’s feelings and emotions interact with these. In Uldam’s case, she relates how even though she shared experiences and nationality with members of the group she was studying, she perceived a level of hostility and scepticism towards outsiders and her lack of social capital in this respect negated the insider status afforded by shared characteristics (2014:49).
Somewhat predictably, the longer I spent in the field the less of an outsider I felt, although this sense has never fully diminished. While the methodological literature emphasises the importance of becoming a familiar presence in order to become accepted as an insider, in my experience my outsider status was as much related to my own insecurity and apprehension. Early on I felt like an outsider in part because I did not know anyone, but also because I felt inexperienced as an activist in this field. I had not attended any of the previous large protest camps which seemed to be a point of connection and familiarity for others. My previous activism, after all, was located in feminist activist communities rather than those of anarchism or environmentalism. At book fairs I worried I was insufficiently anarchist, having never familiarised myself with the finer points of Bakunin or Proudhon’s writing. I also felt I was insufficiently radical (as an insider of the academic establishment) and my failure to have been and reluctance now to get arrested called into question my commitment to my beliefs (something I still struggle with). From a position of hindsight that has resulted from becoming increasingly comfortable with the contradictions of my identity as an activist and an academic, I can now see that these concerns were for the most part unfounded or exaggerated, and were not issues that participants or other activists picked up on or held against me. The longer I spent immersed in this project, the more credible I felt in my various roles, and this increased the reference points I had with the women I interviewed. When asking them about their activism they would often cite events or campaigns that I had participated in, or at least been aware of, and as such I was able to ask more specific questions about their experiences or ask for clarification on points. While I did not feel previously that establishing rapport with interviewees was difficult or problematic, the specificity of the ground we shared made me feel more competent in my capacity to elicit information. However my familiarity with certain issues or campaigns required careful reflection during the analysis to ensure that I did not place undue emphasis on their importance just because they resonated with my own experiences.

**Ethics**

Ethical concerns are of central importance for feminist research, particularly because ethical dilemmas are inherently moral and political ones that “raise the ‘whose side are we on?’ question” (Finch 1984:85). As a young White woman interviewing a group
that consisted predominantly of other young White women, all of whom were educated to a minimum of degree level, the potential for a power differential to impact of the research may not be immediately apparent. Yet as a researcher and an academic, my power lies in my responsibility for the representation of these women’s views, actions and experiences and in the knowledge production that arises from this. For feminist researchers ethicality is bound up with the political intentions of research and the collective, as well as individual, interests that are at stake (Gillies and Alldred 2001; Finch 1984). For Finch (1984), an important ethical concern which is frequently absent from rationalist and universalist ethical models is the issue of the representation of groups, namely the political ends to which research findings can be put that are detrimental to the groups studied.

The question of advocating for marginalised groups through research, while by no-means exclusive to feminist research has certainly been championed by feminists as one way in which to challenge the ideological subordination of relatively powerless members of society by the powerful. To advocate for people necessarily involves the rejection of positivist notions of the objective and detached researcher and instead requires “an emotional as well as an intellectual commitment to promoting their interests” (Finch 1984: 86). The emotional commitment of the feminist researcher is embedded within a feminist ethics of care to which much feminist research ascribes. For Hill Collins (1991) the criteria for ethical knowledge-making comprise: an acknowledgment of the primacy of lived experience; dialogue in assessing knowledge claims; an ethic of care; and an ethic of personal accountability on the part of the researcher. Such undertakings require compassion, empathy, emotional honesty and expressiveness from the researcher in order to establish a genuine rapport with the participant and promote a model based upon dialogue (Edwards and Mauther 2002:25).

While feminist approaches to research rightly establish a reflexive examination of power and a commitment to promoting the interests of marginalised groups as central to ethical practice, this is not necessarily the case in the wider research community. In particular, concern over the impact of bureaucratic ethics requirements from departments, institutions and funders currently taking place (Gillan and Pickerill 2012)
echo similar debates that have been occurring since at least the late 1970s (Thorne 1980). Despite being lengthy and complex processes that have to be gone through to have research ethically approved, they rarely address the ethical issues that emerge in the course of the research. Such bureaucratic processes rarely distinguish between the types of risks common to different disciplines, e.g. social or medical sciences, and several authors (Gillan and Pickerill 2012; Macfarlane 2010) have argued that the ‘tick-box’ culture of ethics which this process results in is limited and reductive, eliminating the natural ambiguity that emerges in the field, ultimately meaning that researchers are unprepared for having to make new ethical decisions as the research progresses. In particular, a tick-box culture of ethics is incompatible with the inductive approach taken by much qualitative research wherein flexibility, spontaneity and accommodation of the unexpected are necessary research tools (Macfarlane 2010:20).

The development of attitudes towards ethical research in the academy over the last 50 years has seen an increasingly critical reflection on earlier studies whose ethical implications are now considered troubling. Research methods students are regularly introduced to the topic of ethics through the use of extreme examples, such as Milgram’s (1963) electric shock study, and particularly within sociology, examples of covert observation that involved the active deception of participants, such as Humphreys’ (1970) ethnography of homosexual encounters. Data collection using covert observation is increasingly difficult to get approved as it contravenes two of the central tenets of most ethical guidelines: protecting participants from harm and participants’ right to privacy.

However, the demonization of covert research is indicative of the reductionism that can occur under a bureaucratic and instrumentalist ethics regime and fails to acknowledge the nuances of covert research. As Spicker (2011) outlines, a lack of full and complete disclosure to research participants does not necessarily constitute the deception of those same people. Spicker (2011) criticises the elision of ‘covert’ and ‘deceptive’ that characterises much discussion of observational methods and highlights the many instances in which the actions of the researcher remain unavoidably covert but do not deceive. Ethical issues regarding harm to participants result, he argues, not from research being covert but from researchers deceiving
participants as to their true identity and intentions. Disclosure as a non-dichotomous concept exists along a spectrum whereby the researcher can be explicit about the aims, methods and intentions of their research but there may remain aspects that the research has not (or indeed, to refer back to the earlier debate about informed consent, cannot) fully explain to everyone (2011:119).

In many instances the reasons for not fully disclosing your identity as a researcher to all those within the site of research are purely practical. In public spaces or at large events, there is little possibility of speaking to everyone and fully explaining the purpose of your presence. Their behaviour may be observed without their knowledge and as such research is occurring covertly, but this is not the same as deceiving participants as to the true nature of your intentions. Furthermore, the extent of disclosure is contingent on the situation. When speaking with individuals or small groups of people I was quick to explain my role as a researcher and PhD student studying activism. Indeed, this usually did not require much initiative on my part but was instead the logical answer to question of “so what do you do?” that is so often asked in introductions. Where people asked further questions I was happy to elaborate, and often this led to productive discussions about various aspects of activist identity and experience. This level of disclosure, however, is not possible in the mass crowd situations that are characteristic of many protests and demonstrations as they do not present opportunities to disclose. In research sites with large numbers of people who cannot be consulted individually it is common practice to gain entry through a gatekeeper and then make others aware of your presence through posters explaining the presence of a researcher. In the case of the activist activities I have been observing, this is not possible. The collective and autonomous organising that characterised many of the events that I attended is such that there is no gatekeeper to approach and if I could identify one of the organisers it would be highly unlikely that they would feel comfortable speaking for everyone else in light of the importance placed on non-hierarchical structures. Further to this, the spaces of protest camps and marches are not conducive to using posters as there are often no walls from which to hang them.
Two successful applications were made to the University of Leicester’s Research Ethics Committee, the first in May 2012 prior to beginning participant recruitment for interview and another, in February 2014, for ethical clearance regarding my retrospective and ongoing participant observation. In order to protect the identities of those participating in the study I have anonymised the data, removing reference to or altering the details of events and groups. Where names are used for individuals, groups or events these are pseudonyms, unless specifically referenced.

Data analysis

I originally aimed for 30 interviews, representing roughly equal proportions of anarchist and environmentalist activists. However, at 20 interviews, and with the pressures of time and diminishing responses from my attempts to recruit participants, I felt confident that the data I had collected provided sufficient depth and detail to present a coherent narrative. This was made possible because the process of analysis began as soon as the data collection began. Rather than viewing collection and analysis as consecutive processes, the analysis had begun in the very act of conducting an interview and writing memos during this process; in reflecting on the interview and its relation to others for several days afterwards; in listening again to the interview during transcription and making notes of relevant links or possible interpretations; in revisiting transcripts in preparation for subsequent interviews. All this occurred before beginning the formal process of highlighting and book-marking in order to develop codes, resulting in an immersion that enhanced my sensitivity to meaning, as Rivas (2012:368) has termed it. As such, thematic codes developed organically through the research process as comments by participants resonated with or stood in contrast to other interviews or my own observations and experiences. Qualitative methods, and particularly semi-structured interviews, are particularly amenable to this form of ongoing analysis, and have been highlighted by Blee and Taylor (2002) as valuable tools for analysing social movements.

Fielding and Thomas (2008:258) have observed that “jotting down thoughts about the data during transcription contributes to subsequent analysis and relieves the tedium of transcription.” While the latter point is certainly over-optimistic, I found the former to be very much true. I made notes on Post-Its and pieces of paper that were stored in a
cardboard box in my office, occasionally tipped out like jigsaw pieces to be shuffled and rearranged. An early attempt at using NVivo to rationalise my analysis process, to streamline and centralise my storage of codes, was quickly abandoned because it left me feeling cold. The introduction of a stage between me and the data made me feel removed and disconnected. Although my substantive writing is always in the first instance typed, to know and understand my data I needed a physical copy. Much like the way in which journal articles or books read electronically tend not to stay with me, so too the data was not tangible until it was on paper in front of me, annotated with highlighters, page markers and post-it notes. Multiple printed copies, or photocopies in the case of handwritten field notes, allowed me to cut out relevant sections of data and group them together to be viewed as a whole. From here it was a process of identifying and refining analytical themes in relation to both my data and the existing literature, testing out ideas in writing and conversation with my supervisors and activist friends to establish the theoretical validity of these ideas.

**Quality and rigour in qualitative research**

In light of the post-positivist turn in the social sciences, the applicability of the traditional criteria for research quality has been questioned in relation to qualitative research. While the positivist paradigm has focused on the validity, reliability, generalisability and objectivity of social research in line with the scientific tradition, some interpretivists have sought to make a radical break from this framework and develop indicators of quality that better respect the integrity of the qualitative paradigm (Peshkin 1993:23). As Creswell and Miller (2000:124) describe, qualitative researchers employ techniques such as triangulation, thick description, peer review, ‘member checking’ and external audits in order to demonstrate the credibility of their studies but acknowledge that there is little guidance available to researchers about which of these techniques is most appropriate for study. In relation to Creswell and Miller’s (2001) procedures for establishing credibility I have utilised methodological triangulation through the use of interviews and participant observation in order to develop a more holistic view of how young women experience and engage with social movement activism. This process also facilitated ‘member checking’ wherein I was able to establish the credibility of my interpretations by having them confirmed or disputed by participants. I hope that, where possible, I have provided description that is ‘thick’
enough as to give the reader a feel for some of the settings in which this data was collected, and that a commitment to reflexive practice has made transparent my motivations and positionality.

Central, I feel, to the case for valid and rigorous qualitative research is the significance of ‘theoretical generalisation’. While quantitative researchers aim to be able to generalise their findings back to the target population on the basis of probability sampling, the value of qualitative research lies in “contribution to some existing body of knowledge or theory” (Seale 2008:533). The “cogency of the theoretical reasoning” (Mitchell 1983:207) will ultimately establish the credibility of this research.

**Conclusion**

The methodological underpinnings and the research design of this study have been the focus of this chapter. It has outlined the feminist approach taken to the research with reference to Verta Taylor’s (1999) five features of feminist methodology. As such this research takes as its focus an issue of gender and inequality. It attempts to understand and give voice to the experiences of young women as a group that, as Chapter 2 asserted, have been marginalised from existing social movement research, and it does so through the use of participatory methods in the form of observations and interviews. In its focus on political and social activism, and in its intent to advocate for young female activists, it is committed to social action, and finally, as a researcher and writer I have undertaken to be reflexive at all times. The thesis now turns to an exploration of the issues that the empirical data raised, and to the development of a theoretical understanding of young women’s social movement activism.
Chapter 5
Becoming Political and Coming to Politics

Introduction
This chapter considers the ways in which the participants in my study became first politically conscious and then politically active. Using academic theory of political socialisation and feminist notions of relational agency, it explores the ways in which various institutions and individuals have influenced these young women’s perceptions of the political world and their own place within it. Importantly, it recognises them as agents in the socialisation process and considers how these experiences contribute to their ongoing activist identity construction. I argue that in contrast to McRobbie’s (2007) ‘top girls’ and Harris’s (2004) ‘can-do girls’, the collective orientation of these young women’s worldview establishes them as ‘wilful women’.

The extent to which young women in contemporary British society are seen as largely apolitical, their attention piqued by popular culture rather than parliament or protest, is such that the participants of my study could be considered ‘unusual’. As I have highlighted in Chapter 2, youth political participation is considered so uncommon that where it does occur academics and policy makers can find it difficult to identify it as such. It is the “infantilising discourse of exceptionalism [that] makes it even more difficult for adults to recognise young people’s political power” (Gordon and Taft 2010:1506). Indeed, as Gordon (2010) identifies, the shortage of academic research regarding youth political action is indicative of the extent to which adolescents and children are considered non-political; “constantly becoming but never quite being” (2010:6). Age, Gordon (2010) contends, is an axis of inequality which particularly affects children and young people in the arena of politics.

Much political socialisation literature is guilty of this in its tendency to consider how children acquire the skills and knowledge they will use to engage with politics as adults, but with no indication that they may equally be of use during childhood and adolescence. In the late 1950s movements within American political science towards the study of political behaviour as learned behaviour led to an interest in the precursors of political behaviour that were established during childhood (Niemi and
Hepburn 1995). As the originator of the term, Hyman (1959:25) theorised political socialisation as the process by which an individual learns “social patterns corresponding to his societal positions as mediated through various agencies.” As such, political socialisation was initially rooted within a functionalist perspective of socialisation which considered the generational transmission of political behaviours to be a crucial means by which social stability was maintained and norms could be inculcated and perpetuated (Hyman 1959; Almond and Verba 1963; Hess and Torney 1967). This perspective presupposes a unidirectional, top-down process akin to educational theories of the child as an ‘empty vessel’ to be filled with hegemonic knowledge supporting the status quo, and as such leaves little room for any notion of the child or young person as an agent.

Nonetheless, as the field gained legitimacy so the focus of political socialisation research broadened beyond Hyman’s (1959) initial focus on voter participation and party identification to consider how political knowledge is acquired and how this contributes to actual or intended political engagement (Hooghe 2004:335). In widening the approach to political socialisation attention has been paid to agents of socialisation that fall outside of the earlier narrow considerations of parents and schooling, and in doing so has begun to address the media, voluntary organisations and peer groups (Hooghe 2004). However, as will be seen in this chapter, these ‘new’ agents of socialisation have received varying degrees of coverage. For the most part, studies remain concerned to explain adult political participation such as voting and partisanship and have little to say on the subject of youth social movement participation. In emphasising the significance of these influences for contemporary young women, this study highlights the need for future research to remain open to exploring stimuli and catalysts for action and mobilisation outside of conventional understandings of the political socialisation process.

As Chapter 2 addressed, ideas of the individualised subject of late modernity emphasise the construction of identity through reflexive choices. However, such approaches risk adopting an abstract humanist approach in which individual choice is all-determining. In arguing for a relational understanding of agency, Mason (2004) contends that “people’s identities and practices are embedded in sets of relationships
that do not fit neatly into and cannot be envisioned through [individualist] frames” (2004:177). Lovell (2003), similarly emphasises the importance of a relational understanding of identity and agency, proposing that “what is required is the recognition of agency as a function of ensemble performances” (2003:2). Such an approach necessitates a consideration of the interactional, collective and socio-historical contexts of action and agency (2003:5).

By identifying the shortcomings and limitations of dominant political socialisation theories I am presenting a case for a reconsideration of political socialisation in relational terms, not as the transfer of knowledge and social norms but as a process of empowerment that is enabled through relational agency. As I argue, the most significant influences on the political identities of the young women in this study are the relationships that they have had (and continue to have) with other individuals. These individuals have in various ways enabled participants to see themselves as agents who are part of a community of action. In this sense, the young women in this study have been empowered in the true sense of the word; they have been given the authority to affect change. This authority comes from the recognition of oneself as an agent and from the development of a critical lens that brings into focus the multiple intersecting manifestations of power in which one is implicated and enmeshed. Having been encouraged and facilitated to understand themselves as agents with the capacity to affect change, these young women now operate with a sense of entitlement to voice their opinions and to claim space in the political sphere.

**Mobilising events**

Political socialisation research may for the most part be concerned with childhood and adolescence but while the issue of age is important it cannot be separated from that of social generation⁴, which locates individuals within specific historical moments. Mannheim’s (1952) theory of generations enables the identification of specific shared locations that constitute groups of individuals as generations rather than as concrete groups determined and bound by physical proximity. These shared cultural and historical locations enable individuals to experience the same events and social

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⁴ Social generation is used here after Pilcher (1994) to distinguish between kinship generations and Mannheim’s sense of generations as cohorts.
disruptions, but differences in participation and engagement result in specific and often antagonist groups.

A generational approach to political socialisation is crucial because as Delli Carpini contends, where “the social, economic, political, and cultural environment is extremely changeable, new generations are often socialized under unique circumstances that are not controlled by any single agent” (1989:13). As such, while specific agents of socialisation will be considered here it is also the case that specific events can be experienced at formative stages of the life course which can shape individuals’ political perspectives and orientations. Sears and Valentino (1997) theorise the potential of exogenous political events to act as catalysts for episodic political socialisation. Using the example of an American presidential electoral campaign they contend that political events provide young people with “occasions for socialisation” through direct and mediated contact with political arguments. In discussing women’s participation in feminist politics in the United States Ford (2002) refers to the importance of ‘mobilising events’ for the development of gender consciousness and cites the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court in 1992 as a critical example of this. The allegations of sexual harassment made by Anita Hill at Thomas’s confirmation hearings and the extensive media coverage that followed put sexual harassment in the workplace in the limelight and for many women politicised their personal experiences through the recognition of gendered inequality (Ford 2002:90).

Mobilising events featured distinctly in the narratives constructed by interviewees, with the commencement of the Iraq war in 2003 being significant for the number of participants who cited it as a seminal event in their journeys to becoming activists. The age range of my sample is such that the build-up to the Iraq war occurred while many of them were in their mid-teens. At this age they were at once old enough to be aware of media coverage of the situation and the contested politics that surrounded it and young enough to be at school and so located within state institutions which became sites of protest (Harrison 2003; Davis 2013). Furthermore, they possessed a degree of maturity and independence sufficient for their parents to allow them to attend the national protest march in London on 15th February 2003. While Chrissy talked of being taken on demonstrations as a child by her parents, the march against the Iraq war was
the first time she remembers making the independent decision to attend a protest and so, with a group of friends, skipped school and went to London to march. She describes the confluence of political events and citizenship education that led to her attending the march:

"It was a really good way of learning about how to take action in a democracy, because obviously we were too young to vote and we were being taught all about democracy and how that all works and how you vote and stuff and we were like well we can’t [vote], what can we do? And then you get told about marches, and you know all the stuff that teachers will tell you like petitions and these sorts of things and you think yeah, let’s go and do that, that’s what it’s all about.

Ruth, meanwhile, organised a mass walk-out from her school in protest at the war when she was 15, liaising with teachers, tutors and police for an event that saw over 500 students from local schools walk out of lessons. What is perhaps particularly significant about the Iraq war as a mobilising event is its legacy as a symbol of the failure of the democratic process: the UK government went to war not only without a mandate from the UN, but without the backing of the British public, 3 million of whom had marched through London to express their opposition. A generation of young people received a swift introduction to the failings of parliamentary democracy when their signatures on petitions, their letters to MPs and ministers and their occupation of public space was ignored and rebuffed by politicians whom history would show to have already made up their minds.

Most interviewees were too young to vote at the time of the Iraq war and so for many their first engagement with national electoral politics came at the 2010 election, in which the Liberal Democrats vied for youth votes with the promise of repealing university tuition fees. Amongst voters aged 18-24 the Liberal Democrats received 30% of the vote, up 7% since 2005 and a larger proportion of the vote compared to their overall share of 24% (Ipsos MORI 2010). Significantly for the gender focus of this research, amongst women age 18-24, their share of the vote increased to 34% making them the most popular party within this demographic (Ipsos MORI 2010). Having stood on a platform of removing tuition fees, the announcement by the Coalition government that tuition fees would treble to £9,000 a year served to severely damage the credibility of not only the Liberal Democrats in particular but the
electoral process more generally amongst younger people (Henn and Foard 2012). The ensuing legacy of distrust and disaffection with parliament is demonstrated by Chrissy’s explication of the issue:

"We’ll never vote Tory because we’re just old enough to understand the fall-out from the Thatcher era and we probably won’t vote for New Labour because of all the things Tony Blair did, and we certainly won’t vote Lib Dem after the tuition fees so you’ve got this whole generation of young people who are completely disillusioned with the major democratic parties, so I think it’ll be really really interesting to see what happens."

Here Chrissy speaks not of an individualised conception of herself, but as a part of a cohort of young people constituted in their marginalisation by, and opposition to, the three mainstream political parties. It is an early indication of the recurring emphasis on collective identity that characterises interviewees’ narratives. In light of such events, young people’s widely documented alienation from party politics (Sloam 2007; Kimberlee 2002) and their preference for extra-parliamentary forms of political participation (Stolle et al 2008; Quintelier 2007) are only too easy to understand (Henn and Foard 2012). Yet, alienation from formal politics does not automatically translate into social movement participation so what follows explores a series of factors relating to political and gender socialisation that may serve as contributing factors to young women’s development as activists.

**Parental influence**

There has been a tendency within much political socialisation literature to identify childhood as the primary stage at which political socialisation occurs, neglecting any consideration of how the experiences throughout the life course can influence political orientation and engagement. The importance of women’s experiences of motherhood as a politicising factor, for example, has been well documented in cases such as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina (Bouvard 2004; Navarro 2001) and anti-toxic waste and anti-nuclear activism at Love Canal (Brown and Ferguson 1995) and Three Mile Island (Culley and Angelique 2005) in the United States. Nonetheless, as none of them have children, the age of my participants is such that any understanding of the factors that shaped their political identities requires a focus on their childhood and adolescent socialisation.
Political socialisation refers not only to the ways in which people learn how to participate in politics and which political beliefs to hold, but also to the very basic issue of whether to be interested in politics and consider it relevant. On this logic the presocialised state of political ignorance and apathy is one which children and young people inhabit until they learn otherwise (Gordon and Taft 2010:1523). The agents of political socialisation identified most frequently are the family, schools, religious institutions and the mass media, with the family by far and away considered the most significant.

Discussion of the factors that determine women’s entry into the political sphere, leads Pharr (1981), for example, to consider two oppositional hypotheses: the family dependence model and the family independence model. The family dependence model emphasises girls’ embeddedness within the family and a greater continued identification with their parents than boys. Male children, it is argued, are socialised to become independent of the family in a way that their female siblings are not, meaning that girls are consequently more responsive to familial political socialisation and less susceptible to outside influences.

The family independence model, meanwhile, contends that changes in women’s gender roles to the extent that their political participation is considered acceptable or even desirable is so recent that it is outside agencies such as schools and peer groups which are better placed to support these changes than the traditional and conservative institution of the family, whose members’ beliefs about gender roles were shaped in the pre-Second World War period. Consequently, the model proposes that political women must have developed their political interest and orientations externally, somewhere other than within the family. While the first model may be more commonplace within American political socialisation literature, the latter is considered particularly relevant to Japan where the family is considered to largely have “surrendered its role in political socialisation to other agents with more credibility for the young” (Pharr 1981:83). Ultimately, however, Pharr finds only “limited support” (1981:91) for either of these hypotheses, indicating that the value of opposing models is limited and denies the possibility of a holistic approach to political socialisation in which attitude development and behavioural orientation can be understood not only
as an incremental and multi-faceted process but also one which does not end with entry to adulthood. Furthermore, Pharr’s analysis relies on a historically and culturally specific theorisation of women’s position that displays no indication of successfully mapping on to the experiences of the women in my study. As I outlined in Chapter 2, the status of young women in contemporary Western societies is characterised at once by their capacity for economic independence and educational success, but also their position in an unstable, flexible and globalised workforce. They are increasingly understood as individualised subjects of neoliberalism operating independently from traditional social structures such as the family, yet also embedded within these structures for increasing periods due to extended youth transitions. As such, contemporary theorisations that are attendant to experiences of insecurity and precarity as well as to privilege and accomplishment are necessary.

Similarly problematic when considering young women’s political participation, political socialisation is all too often framed as a top-down process whereby adults instruct children whose ability to learn correctly determines the effectiveness of their adult participation (Gordon and Taft 2010). The need for children to be directly taught the specificities of political science is disputed by the experiences of the young women in my study who demonstrate the extent to which political participation is the result not of being taught in a formal sense but of being nurtured to develop the requisite transferable skills and appropriate outlook (compassion, intolerance of injustice, community etc). They must see around them an environment in which expressing opinions is valued and they need to feel that they have the right to inhabit political space where it exists and that they are entitled to create their own where it does not (a theme that is revisited in discussions of feminist spaces in Chapter 8). This approach can come from treating children and young people as autonomous and capable people in their own right, rather than as as-yet unformed adults.

Parents play a particularly important role in this process as agents of socialisation but models that posit this process as a top-down transference have been critiqued for their failure to acknowledge young people as reflective agents (Yates and Youniss 1998) or the potentially reciprocal nature of political socialisation (McDevitt and Chaffee 2002). Most women in the study were not raised by activist parents and so
their own political participation cannot be explained simply by mimicry or modelling. What was significant, however, was that parents were, for the most part, politically and socially aware. In some cases this was related to parents’ professions, such as in the cases of Catherine – “my dad works in renewable energy, my mum’s a social worker so I wasn’t exactly ignorant of it at any stage” – and Lena, whose mother “worked for the GLC under Ken Livingston in the ’80s and so she was quite anti-Tory”.

Others were versed in the realities of social inequality as the result of lived experience. Lena, Zoe and Jodie were all daughters of single mothers and their experience of the causal and resultant structural inequalities afforded them all an intimate understanding of social justice issues. Zoe was raised by her mother and grandmother in an all-female household that self-identified as working class. Despite their class identification, Zoe says that they were not explicitly political, rather their understanding of society stemmed from their experiences. As well as working in low-pay, low-status jobs, Zoe described how her mother and grandmother had both experienced male violence and linked their identification as working class and feminist by stating: “there is an us and them antagonism that both maps on to men and women and also maps on to haves and have nots.”

Class and gender were similarly linked for Jodie, whose experiences as the child of a single mother taught her plenty about the social and political system, and which deserve to be related at length:

my dad was in the RAF basically because he got my mum pregnant and needed a job and couldn’t get a job, so we moved to Sri Lanka when I was really little so being the only White kid in school was, and seeing it’s right in the middle of civil war there and seeing this army influence and seeing my dad went to the Gulf war and the poverty over there and the clear fact that I had way more access to resources and stuff than anyone around me it was very interesting as a kid. Noticing, sucking all this stuff up. And we went from that to moving back to [hometown] which is a seriously grim area of suburb, really dirt poor, shit-hole basically and getting moved from one place to the next because we couldn’t find somewhere that would take housing benefit with two kids; it was a nightmare for a single mum. And so that exposed me to all these observations of poverty and domestic violence around me and people my mum had been with and I could
clearly see how the system was fucking over women constantly.

Here Jodie describes not only the poverty and social exclusion that characterised her childhood, but also details her experience of living in Sri Lanka as a relatively privileged Westerner. Her understanding of the global nature of inequality and her multiple positionings possessing and also lacking privilege have clearly been influential in the way in which she appreciated and engages with the complexity of the social world. Jodie goes on to explain that her mother is not political in the orthodox sense, but that she acted in such a way that has shaped her own outlook on the world:

She’s very compassionate and aware like if we were walking down the street and she’s got 5 quid left in the world, she’ll still give a quid to a homeless guy, so to have had that influence from her that also made my view of the world a lot more heightened.

Chrissy was unusual amongst my interviewees in that her parents were engaged in social movement politics, including anti-fascist and feminist activism. She remembers being taken on a march when she was in primary school, but her recollection focuses not on the politics of the event, but on being carried on her father’s shoulders and the pleasure of being allowed to have chips afterwards. Her parents did not force their politics on their children; rather they “just sowed seeds really well”. Similarly to the way in which Jodie learned about compassion through her mother’s actions, Chrissy’s understanding of the importance of political engagement is the result of observing and appreciating the example her parents set regarding productive and positive ways of relating to the world. It is only now in her twenties and because of her own activism that Chrissy is learning about the activism her parents were involved in:

My mum was at Greenham Common and I didn’t know that until I told her I was going to [protest camp] and she was like ‘oh I’m really pleased you’re carrying on all of these family traditions’ and I didn’t know they were family traditions!

While parental political socialisation is significant, there is little agreement on whether a particular parent is more influential than the other. Sigel (1990) found that within American families the father had a greater influence, while Mayer and Schmidt (2004) found mothers to have an equal effect. Gidengil et al (2010), meanwhile, found that
having a politically active mother had a “consistent and significant effect” on young women’s political participation. While the influence of the father was much more limited, it was as significant as the mother in the case of non-parliamentary politics. For the women in my study what does seem significant is the importance of mothers as role models, not necessarily in terms of political socialisation but certainly in terms of gender socialisation.

**Gender socialisation**

The issue of age as an axis of inequality, particularly in relation to political socialisation serves to remind us that “political socialisation exists at the nexus of gender, race and class systems of power and privilege” (Gordon and Taft 2010:1510). As Anderson and Cook (1985) have argued, “there are clear differences in sex-role socialization which can plausibly be argued to have political effects” (1985: 608). To this end, gender socialisation *is* political socialisation because girls who are socialised by progressive or feminist parents are taught to see a wider range of possible roles and identities for themselves. From a cohort perspective, the young women in this study are the daughters or the granddaughters of feminism’s Second Wave: the children of mothers who themselves came of age in the wake of the Women’s Liberation Movement and the ‘genderquake’ (Wolf 1993) that it had instigated. This was a time when women’s workforce participation was increasing; when the country had its first, and to date only, female prime minister; when single mothers were increasingly visible yet nonetheless stigmatised; when ideas of gender roles within intimate relationships were beginning to be renegotiated; when feminism was being discussed in the mainstream media (regardless of how favourably). For many women having children in the 1980s and 1990s, discourses of gender equality were inescapable.

During this time the idea of non-sexist childrearing was being explored within feminist circles (Statham 1982; Richardson 1993). Non-sexist childrearing practices emphasised the significance of social conditioning on gender roles and sought to provide a wider range of choices from which children could choose; to ‘open up options’ (Statham 1982) for girls and boys, rather than to prevent them from engaging in certain activities. For girls this also involved instilling the confidence and self-efficacy necessary for them to value themselves as active participants in the world, and helping
them to develop skills they need to challenge and resist the sexism they experience in the wider world (Richardson 1993:127).

As well as the direct messages that children receive from their parents regarding appropriate and normative behaviour, implicit messages and the examples provided by parents’ behaviour have a significant influence on gender socialisation. Several of my interviewees spoke of non-traditional family structures such as being raised by single mothers in the case of Lena, Zoe, Chrissy and Jodie, or the reversal of gender roles as in Sam’s case:

When I was really young my dad stayed at home and looked after us all my mum went out to work so we had conversations about that and my mum had a lot more control over the household so I think I always subconsciously believed in the equality of men and women by didn't actualise it until I learned what the word meant probably.

While heteronormative family forms are such that parenting is ideally a practice engaged in by both mothers and fathers, within the feminist literature, and indeed from the narratives conveyed by interviewees, it is mothers who are particularly significant. Adrienne Rich (1977) was seminal in her critique of motherhood, distinguishing between motherhood as a patriarchal institution and the practice of mothering as a potential source of empowerment, and in doing so exploring the violence done to mother-daughter relationships under patriarchy. It is mothers, she argued, who teach girls how to conform to a restrictive and patriarchal femininity, “a degrading and dispiriting role” (1977:243), in the belief that it is necessary for them to succeed. She called for women to work to free themselves from motherhood and focus instead on mothering as a female-centred, non-hierarchical, empowering practice, arguing that to be transformative feminist mothering required an emancipated mother because “as daughters we need mothers who want their own freedom and ours. We need not to be the vessels of another woman’s self-denial and frustration” (1977:247). Such emancipation is a requisite precursor for non-sexist childrearing to be successful (Rich 1977; O’Reilly 2008), not least because of the mother’s status as role model: “a mother’s victimisation does not merely humiliate her, it mutilates the daughter who watches her for clues as to what it means to be a woman” (Rich 1997:247).
In my research progressive approaches to gender were visible when interviewees talked about their childhoods and family homes. Chrissy spoke of a visit to the Women’s Library and “recognising stuff from our house [...] the Spare Rib magazines and the Jackie Flemming cartoons” while Lena’s mother had alphabet friezes where “Anne is an Architect, Betty is a builder and that kind of stuff”. Gender transgression figured significantly in Debi’s childhood, playing football and identifying as gender queer, all of which her parents supported her in in spite of opposition from others in their community. Being outspoken and taking up space (both physically and verbally) are contraindicated to both traditional and more contemporary notions of femininity and yet are crucial to political subjectivity so girls who feel more able to transgress conventional gender norms are more likely to see their participation in politics as possible (or rather are less likely to see the barriers to it in the first place). Yet this is not a unilateral process as normative gender roles designate the political as unfeminine meaning that parents who socialise girls to be political socialise them to challenge gender norms in everyday life, particularly those associated with emphasised femininity.

This is not to say that the eschewal of femininity is a prerequisite for women wishing to participate in politics. As studies of women’s ‘feminine’ protest (e.g. Laurie 2011; Aske 2006; Culley and Angelique 2003) have demonstrated, there are aspects of femininity and women’s traditional gender roles that can be effectively employed within activism both to convey messages and defuse opposition. In the case of young women, gender socialisation can, as Taft’s (2011) study has shown, become a resource. For these girls, typically feminine characteristics – “hopeful, dreamy, idealistic and compassionate” (Gordon and Taft 2010:1509) – served to underscore their political optimism and commitment. Rather, I contend that progressive gender socialisation facilitates a gender consciousness which affords young women’s politicised worldview a sense of validity. Rinehart describes gender consciousness as “one’s recognition that one’s relationship to the political world is at least partly but nonetheless particularly shaped by being female or male” (1992:32), leading to an identification with and positive affect towards a gender group with whom one’s interests and fortunes are linked. Crucially for women, as with race or class consciousness, it is the group’s socio-political disadvantage, marginalisation and
oppression that ensure this consciousness is politicised. Women’s gender consciousness is celebrated by Rinehart (1992) as offering women an opportunity to break a cycle of passivity and non-participation in politics that results from traditional gender socialisation, structural barriers and life-course factors.

The progressive gender socialisation experienced by many interviewees and their subsequent emergent gender consciousness has inspired them to inhabit the world as active, engaged and expectant. Contrary to the depoliticised, individualised subject positions of ‘top girls’ (McRobbie 2007) and ‘can-do girls (Harris 2004a), these young women are politicised, engaged and wilful. Their engagement with structural and cultural inequalities that contribute to injustice and oppression is deliberate and forthright, and informed by their orientation to collective ways of being that link them to groups of others. They are ‘wilful women’: wilful in that their engagement is not acquiescent to the neoliberal choice agenda, but is mobilised in part in opposition to it; and women because they are, in the here and now, adults for whom the designation ‘girl’ is inappropriate and infantilising. I develop this concept in more detail in Chapter 7.

The process by which women become gender conscious presented by Rinehart resembles that of Ford’s (2002) ‘mobilising events’: “for an individual woman, gender consciousness awakens when she reinterprets the socialisation process… [when] some catalytic event causes a woman to think that, perhaps, politics and other important activities are not ‘things better done by men’; that women too have contributions to make” (Rinehart 1992:32). Yet for some of the women in this study gender consciousness prefigured their political mobilisation (Lena, for example, describes how “the feminist position of women came before the class analysis for me”) and so for this cohort needs to be seen as having resulted from, rather than enabling their victory over, childhood gender socialisation.

**Role models, mentors and intergenerational relationships**

Role models have long been recognised as important agents of socialisation, with considerable interest in their role in professional socialisation since Merton (1968) identified the significance of established physicians as a ‘reference group’ for those in medical school. With regards to political socialisation and gender, studies have shown
that female politicians can act as role models to girls and young women, with higher female representation associated with higher political discussion and (anticipated) participation (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007; Koch 1997), while the presence of women in electoral races has been determined to increase women’s political proselytising (Hansen 1997).

The notion of a role model is not uncontested, with theorists seeking to differentiate between different types of role model. Merton (1968), for instance, distinguishes between the role model as one who is looked up to and whom the follower seeks to emulate in certain aspects often relating to professional roles, and the ‘reference individual’ who provides a more comprehensive identity influence that extends beyond the specific behaviours or attributes associated with a single role. Addis (1996), meanwhile, differentiates between role model and mentor, noting that the role model-emulator relationship need not be two-way in that the role model may not be aware of the follower’s admiration, whereas the mentor-protégé relationship is necessarily reciprocal. The mentor-protégé relationship, crucially, must be linked by “physical space and authority-vulnerability social nexus” (1996:1418). Common to these definitions is a hierarchical relationship between a socially elevated individual and an ‘apprentice’ figure which, as I will demonstrate, does not accurately reflect the relationships described by the women in this study. In her exploration of women’s role models, Fisher (1988) critiqued the hierarchical implications of the archetype of the role model: “In subtle and not-so-subtle ways, such advocacy perpetuates the logic of domination, by encouraging us to look up to ‘special women’ rather than to look around us for the women with whom we might act” (1988:212, original emphasis).

Some participants were able to identify figures who fitted with Addis’ notion of a role model, in that they were public or mythic figures who provided inspiration in a limited range of roles and with whom the women had no direct relationship. Megan, for example, cited watching a lot of David Attenborough documentaries as inspiring her interest in nature, while Lena identified with Robin Hood: “I definitely bought into Manichean struggle as a kid, into like the bad guys and the good guys, but really into the good guys. Like Robin Hood, genuinely he was quite a role model for me.”
However, much more frequently the individuals who provided inspiration or guidance in participants’ narratives were other women with whom they had tangible relationships that were characterised by mutual respect and reciprocity rather than the authority-vulnerability social nexus of Addis’ (1996) description. As such ‘mentor’ carries with it too many connotations of institutional structures and formalised programmes that point to a professionalism which does not apply here. Rather, as aunts, family friends, and older activists, these women have acted as nurturing and encouraging figures who embodied the qualities of positive, feminist mothering without the biological connection. They are figures who I am conceptualising as ‘significant (m)others’ and in doing so reference but expand upon Collins’ (1990) notion of ‘othermothers’; the women within many African American communities who in caring for children share mothering responsibilities with a child’s biological mother. Intergenerational relationships in which older women are sources of inspiration and encouragement are seen as invaluable for validation and healthy psychological development (Sullivan 1996). Such relationships are of note for the young women in my study because “from childhood girls are more likely than boys to participate in an intergenerational world of women” (Rhodes et al 2007:143) and “the politics of recognition” (Addis 1996) that occurs within relationships with other members of a subordinated group is relevant to women’s shared experiences of gender-based inequalities. Importantly, the significant (m)others identified by interviewees were not necessarily explicitly political figures. Instead, like the way participants’ own mothers inspired them, significant (m)others provided an exemplar of womanhood that represented aspects of non-traditional femininity that are important precursors to women’s political participation, namely strength, outspokenness and independence.

The significance of non-parental adults in the socialisation process has not always been acknowledged in traditional socialisation theories. However, studies of resilience amongst underprivileged and marginalised urban youth have demonstrated the significance of mentors and adult role models in developing positive identities and behaviours (Beam et al 2002; Zimmerman et al 2002). The significant (m)others identified by interviewees in my study embodied traits to which they continue to aspire. Ruth frequently emphasised the value she saw in being raised around “strong
women” who also displayed typically feminine attributes related to caring, citing her aunt as an example: “she again is very strong, but can be quite light and jokey and warm, she’s quite intense in conversations but very successful and she’s managing an eco-centre.” Similarly the mother of a friend she knew as a teenager remains someone she deeply respects, despite no longer having a relationship with:

she’s one of these really strong women who does stuff, who organises stuff and has a real presence, is a really strong women, really efficient, really doing very respectable but also very warm and very female and caring in a lot of ways.

While Ruth’s aunt has been a role model in respect of her environmental activism, more importantly the older women she speaks of were valuable for their example of ways to be a woman that celebrate independence and strength without forgoing feminine aspects of warmth, communication and caring which Ruth emphasises as crucial to her own identity and the activist work she does.

Similarly, when Catherine speaks of the older woman she knew as a child and who served as an inspiration and a role model, her influence was not in terms of political activism but as an example of the possibilities of womanhood:

The woman who taught me to ride horses when I was a teenager loved the natural environment and taught us to love it and spend a lot of time out in and is a strong woman with no male characters in her life and I think that sort of role model is really important for young women and drastically missing from a lot of people [laughs] so she really changed my life.

The woman in question would take her horse and travel around the UK for two months every year, providing Catherine with a stark and valuable contrast to the idea that women are vulnerable, that “they can’t travel on their own for two months, bad things will happen.”

Anushka was inspired by a woman she met at a protest camp but in describing the attributes of this woman that she admired it was her qualities as a woman rather than necessarily an activist that came across most immediately:

she’s maybe in her 40s and she’s got a couple of kids but she was still at [protest camp], she was still doing stuff, she seemed really capable and really sorted and I’m well impressed at her
ability to be a mother and be really involved and come across as a totally sorted person.

Evident in Ruth’s, Catherine’s, and Anushka’s comments here is the relevance of action and ‘doing’ in contrast to traditional notions of feminine passivity. Chodorow (1989) considers how strong relationships between women within communities, families or friendship groups serve not only to protect women as mothers from isolation but also to provide alternative models of identification to girls as they grow up. These significant (m)others are of particular importance in situations where compounding factors of poverty, violence and mental ill-health are such that mothers are not able to act as the role models and inspirations that they may wish to. As described earlier, one of my interviewees, Jodie, grew up in a deprived area and was familiar with the effects of poverty and domestic violence. She was 11 when she met “a handful of women” who were involved in animal rights activism whose friendship and guidance she greatly valued as a teenager, but their role was all the more significant because of her mum’s ill-health:

[When] I was little they were people that I was inspired [by], I was amazed that they were doing it full-time, they were really organised and I think my mum suffered from clinical depression for about 6, 7 years, breakdowns and stuff, so I think it almost seemed I had them on more of a pedestal because they seemed so strong compared to my mum.

Again, here the emphasis is on women’s strength, capacity and active engagement with the world, recurring themes evident in Ruth’s, Catherine’s and Anushka’s narratives. For interviewees as girls and young women, these are traits and behaviours that they admired and coveted, but critically they are ideals that are attainable in their own lives. Unlike the individualised, wealth-orientated celebrity worship encouraged by popular culture and media (Allen 2011; Mendick et al 2015), these significant (m)others represent realistic examples of empowered and uncompromising ways of engaging with the world as women to which interviewees could aspire, and realise.

**Peer influence**

While the role of significant (m)others represents an extra-familial, intergenerational relationship from which young women draw strength, they remain characterised by a difference in age and generational cohort that mirrors that of familial relationships.
The adult-centric nature of most political socialisation literature is such that it has largely ignored peer groups as agents of socialisation (Gordon and Taft 2010). Where peers have been considered, peer socialisation and peer influence is largely addressed in terms of deviant or delinquent behaviour (smoking, drug-taking, criminal activity, eating disorders etc) which neglects its potential for positive influence and sway.

Youth-led socialisation was central to the success of the activism of the young people in Taft’s and Gordon’s studies, not least because it addressed some of the problems of adultism involved in family-based political socialisation and civic education. Brown et al (2008) identify peer influence as being multidirectional (equally significant in healthy behaviours as risky or harmful ones); multidimensional (there being multiple modes of influence from straight-forward ‘peer pressure’ to ‘behavioural display’ and ‘structuring opportunities’); and complex. Importantly, the extent to which peer influence can affect attitudes or behaviours depends on “the salience of those exerting influence” (Brown et al 2008:28).

Peer socialisation is most obviously associated with the formative stages of adolescence and youth but interestingly the influence of particular friendships on the politicisation and participation of women in my study was not restricted to this period. Instead, peer influence was identifiable at various ages. For Ruth this occurred during secondary school, citing the role her “cool 15 year old friend” played in sparking her interest in animal rights: “I had a couple of friends who were a few years older and they were cool hippies and Jade said that you shouldn’t test on animals and I thought that was dead cool and dead right.” Jade was, she says, “quite a role model, she really cared about stuff and she was quite politically engaged for her age and has continued to be.”

Zoe’s boyfriend at university played a role in orienting her political outlook from a feminist and class-based politics to anarchism and environmentalism when she went with him to a Climate Camp. University was also the site of Naomi’s introduction to environmental politics through her two best friends. As she describes:

Two particular characters have a lot to answer for and they’re two of my very best friends, and they set up the environmental society and they’d both come from more radical backgrounds
and they set up the environmental society at university and we got involved and we started just doing things, like trying to stop car parks being built.

Simone, meanwhile, became part of an activist community quite some time after her undergraduate studies, but through a friend she had met at university:

Well I didn’t really come to [the social centre] with the idea that I was an activist and I wanted to get involved in activism, so I’ve probably been coming to [here] for about 4 years and prior to that I don’t think I really understood what activism was but I had a friend who I met at uni who was kind of going down a path of radicalism who got involved in this place and wanted to show it to me.

These influential peer relationships continue through women’s lives, and as many of the women interviewed explained, the people who inspire them in their current activism are the women activists they work alongside.

**University experiences**

As is apparent from accounts of participants’ introduction to activism through their peers, university is an important space in which political socialisation and mobilisation occurs and is worth exploring in more depth. Much research has indicated the significance of education on political participation, to the extent that until recently there was consensus that higher levels of education confer benefits which lead to increased political activity (Kam and Palmer 2008:612). In particular university education is considered to lead to increased interest and participation in, and knowledge of, politics. There has, however, begun to be a debate as to whether education is the direct cause of participation, or whether it is merely a proxy for other factors such as class and wealth (Kam and Palmer 2008; Berinsky and Lenz 2011; Persson 2012). The latter argument contends that children from middle class families are more likely to attend university than their working class peers, and are also more likely to participate in political activity; therefore class status is the causal factor in political participation rather than education. While there is evidence in support of both theories, Crossley (2008) shifts the debate away from the politicising effect of education itself and focuses instead on the university experience and campuses in particular as spaces of politicisation and mobilisation. Crossley (2008:24) critiques theories that link the liberal and progressive philosophy of universities with the
radicalisation of students, citing examples of student movements that emerge within non-liberal contexts (such as China) or in support of non-liberal causes (such as fascism and Islamism). Instead, it is the spaces within university campuses and the social networks that form within them that serve to recruit and mobilise young people to political activism. Moving from smaller schools and colleges to universities with much larger student populations provides young people with the opportunity to encounter a wider range of individuals and therefore a broader set of political attitudes (Crossley and Ibrahim 2012).

In her interview, Katie described how growing up in a relatively affluent and conservative part of the country meant that she “really struggled to find opportunities to be politically active” and so she saw university as a chance to “get really involved in the student movement and find opportunities to start pushing for more of a political agenda.” Leaving behind old friendship groups and living in shared student accommodation are both triggers for meeting new people and forming new relationships (Crossley 2008). The three-year degree is such that a culture of political activism on campus often already exists which new students will encounter, and in some cases join and go on to sustain for the duration of their study (Crossley 2008). Debi, another interviewee, came to the UK from North America for postgraduate study and while she had been politically active in her home country she identifies her university campus as a crucial site for her introduction to activism in Britain: “A lot of the activism that I got involved with in this country to start with was through the student occupations.” For Naomi, campus activism served as the key site of her politicisation:

I think [I was] definitely politicised at university and actively involved by the end of it in groups and demonstrations and wanting to go out and demonstrate against it. There was an arms factory down the road at university, there used to be a weekly demonstration there and things. So it all just started to slip into daily life and became routine, it didn’t become this big thing, it just became something that we did.

University not only provided Naomi with the physical space and proximity to targets of contention that facilitated her activism, but most importantly fellow students who shared similar worldviews. That it “just became something that we did” emphasises
the potential for cultures of political action to emerge within universities where relevant networks of people come together. Naomi locates herself not as an individual or a maverick, but as an integral part of a community of activists for whom politics was the lived reality of their everyday lives, thereby emphasising the relational aspect of political agency.

Crossley (2008) has demonstrated that the Student’s Union serves a particularly significant role in the production and maintenance of a political culture on campus, centralising network connections and resources (see also Crossley and Ibrahim 2012). The political nature of Students’ Unions in UK universities certainly varies; some have long histories of political radicalism, some are politically conservative, while others are largely apolitical in relation to events outside of their own institution. Nonetheless, Students’ Unions act as a central hub for socialising, finding information and organising campaigns and as such are where politically inclined individuals are likely to meet like-minded students. Student groups and campaigns often rely heavily on the resources provided by Students’ Unions utilising meeting rooms, computers, printing services and campaign funds (Crossley and Ibrahim 2012:600). Furthermore, Students’ Unions are spaces for ‘doing politics’ within the Union Parliament itself, offering formal campaigning and advocacy roles for individuals to take on and for which they receive training and funding. Officer roles, both at individual universities and on the national NUS Executive Council, enable elected students to represent marginalised groups (as in the case of Women’s Officer and Black Students’ Officer) and to campaign on social issues (such as global justice and environmentalism).

Two interviewees in my study, Sabreen and Anushka, had formal roles within their Students’ Unions. Anushka held various posts during her time at university, including acting as her Union’s Green Officer and Environmental Awareness Officer. They were roles that provided her with a lot of experience that would prove valuable in her later activism, familiarising her with “organising events, publicising events, and picking flyers up and posters up and that sort of thing.” Sabreen also used her role within the Students’ Union, as Multicultural Representative, to do environmental activism, instigating an environmental audit and environmental sustainability action plan. To do this she spent a lot of time liaising with members of staff and the university’s
management, a process that although frustratingly bureaucratic she thought was ultimately worth it due to the importance of the issue.

University is often cited anecdotally as an important stage in people’s lives and as an experience that opened their eyes and led them in new directions. For Sabreen this was definitely the case, but it was the mobilising effect of university, and the space and support it provided her to act politically that had the most significant impact rather than the academic and educational aspect. She went to university to study geography because she saw it as a subject that would allow her to focus on issues of importance to her such as environmentalism and social justice. However having not studied the subject at GCSE or A-Level, she struggled academically. She describes her student activism as what got her through university: “I found lots of stuff that I was good at – lobbying, campaigning, helping people achieve things that I thought were important.” It gave her a direction that she is now pursuing post-graduation, as well as valuable skills and close friends that are helping her do this.

Sabreen was disappointed that her university course did not address many of the issues she had hoped it would, and that ultimately it was not as political as it could have been. Crossley (2008) has argued against the idea that some subjects, specifically those within the social sciences and humanities, are inherently politicising by using data showing that social theory does not necessarily translate into political action. All bar one of my interviewees studied social science or humanities degrees but none have indicated that the content of these subjects was what alone mobilised them to act. Chrissy, for example, cites the issues that were covered in her International Politics degree as thought-provoking but this occurred concurrently with being with new people in a place where, as she describes, “there was so much to get involved with, there were always occupations, always meetings”. She attended a university with a history of radical politics at a time when the political climate was such that campus activism was rife, covering events such as Operation Cast Lead (the Gaza war of 2009/10) and the introduction of tuition fees by the coalition government. University student groups had strong links with national campaigns and activist groups, including Unite Against Fascism.
The opportunity that university provided for interviewees to meet politically like-minded people was important for many of them in participating in activism. Interestingly, however, in some cases it was the people to whom they were politically opposed who had an equally significant impact. Lena attended Oxbridge and her experience of so many privileged and privately educated students as well as her university’s reputation for political conservatism spurred her on post-graduation to participate in socialist and anarchist groups. Chrissy found her university “quite a polarising place”, because although there was plenty of left-wing activism, it also attracted a lot of privileged students with less progressive politics. As she describes,

[they] dressed up as Nazis, ...as American soldiers and Guantanamo Bay inmates, ...as celebrity paedophiles and abused children, so I guess you might be able to see why I became radicalised because there was all of this stuff that was just so wrong going on all the time!

While universities are clearly valuable as spaces of opportunity for political participation, studies of university as a site for politicisation, such as Crossely’s (2008) and Crossley and Ibrahim’s (2012) have not sufficiently addressed the role that encountering political opposition plays in group identity formation and resulting activism. For Chrissy, for example, it was in the face of this opposition that relationships were strengthened and formative experiences of collectivism and solidarity occurred:

But then the thing is the camaraderie that came from that; you’d meet people who also think that all of these things are disgusting and wrong. Especially through the occupation, when you’re living with people and organising with people and all the things like that you become so close because you’re just involved in each other’s lives to such an intense degree. And especially because as students you’re doing a lot of stuff for the first time so it’s all super super exciting and you haven’t really been beaten down by lots of failures yet so you have this belief that it’s all going to change, and the vote’s going to get defeated and you’re going to have free education and all of these things and that makes it a really special time.

Here, Chrissy’s relationships with other progressive activist students were strengthened as a result of sharing campus space with individuals and groups whose politics were opposed to their own. The development of a collective identity produced
relationships characterised by solidarity and mutuality in the face of opposition. The significance of strong networks to relational agency, and a sense of political efficacy that emerges from an understanding of oneself as part of a larger community, are central to understandings of young women’s political agency as relational and collective.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated the multiple and varied influences on young women’s political socialisation and participation. In doing so it has highlighted areas of importance that have previously received only limited attention by socialisation theorists, such as non-familial intergenerational relationships and peer friendships, indicating a need to look beyond traditional agents of socialisation in order to fully comprehend young women’s experiences of politicisation. In particular I have drawn attention to the extent to which gender socialisation plays a central role in predisposing women to taking an active interest in the political. Progressive gender socialisation promotes the opening up of options to girls and provides the opportunity for them to develop a gender consciousness that explicitly links their experiences of girlhood to unequal political power structures. Rather than being encouraged to shape themselves as passive, submissive, meek and obliging, as traditional femininity would require, progressive gender socialisation encourages girls’ exploration of active, defiant, outspoken and expectant ways of being that much more easily map on to the occupation of space required for ‘wilful women’ to engage in political acts to challenge these aspects of this inequality.

Additionally in exploring the role of relationships with mothers, ‘significant (m)others’ and friends I have emphasised the need to examine not just structural agents of socialisation such as the family and education, but to identify the significance of the relationships that occur within these institutions. As the consideration of university experiences conveyed, it is the social networks that universities facilitate rather than just the education that they provide that oriented the young women interviewed for this study towards social movement activism. Of considerable interest is the way in which the relationships which have had the most impact on participants are characterised by a horizontalism and mutuality that is absent from traditional
theorisations of socialisation as a top-down process of passive learning. Instead the reciprocity and solidarity that are at the heart of these affiliations indicates a potential for active engagement in the socialisation process by young women as autonomous agents. As the next chapter will explore, these early and instrumental experiences of positive non-hierarchical relationships can be seen to have persisted beyond their initial political awakening to inform these young women’s ideological approaches to political organising.
Chapter 6
Organisational Structures of Women’s Social Movement Activism

Introduction
The decision to use anarchist and environmental social movement organisations as sites for the study of young women’s political participation resulted in part from an understanding, detailed in Chapter 3, that the two movements provided related but different organisational structures that shape experiences of and opportunities for activism. The political philosophy of anarchism and its critique of domination through hierarchies of power necessitates the adoption of horizontality, autonomy and solidarity as central organising principles. As such, activist groups whose politics are explicitly anarchist were expected to provide an opportunity to determine the extent to which women benefit from organisational structures that explicitly address concepts of power and privilege. While many environmental groups began life in the 1970s as collectivist, grassroots organisations, the adoption of environmental discourses by governments in the 1980s and 1990s meant that the likes of Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace were no longer fringe groups and as such began to be engaged with by politicians and legislators. As a result many environmental groups underwent a process of professionalisation and bureaucratisation that significantly affected their campaigning tactics and organisational structure (Seager 1993). They became what McCarthy and Zald (1973) have theorised as professional movement organisations within a professionalised social movement.

I had envisioned this professionalisation as providing a counterpoint to informal anarchist forms of organising. However, as Chapter 3’s discussion on the emergence of environmental direct action indicated, the easy separation of anarchism and environmentalism is by no means clear cut for two main reasons. Firstly, while sections of the environmental movement went through a period of bureaucratisation, grassroots environmental groups persisted and continue to emerge on a regular basis. While large organisations formalised and centralised their organisational structure, smaller groups continue to operate according to collectivist principles. Secondly, the environmental direct action (EDA) movement, the point at which anarchist and environmental movements intersect, is one of the most prominent social movements
in the UK today. Having emerged during the anti-roads protests in the 1990s and
grown through the Camps for Climate Action during the 2000s, the EDA movement is
currently thriving in the face of the prospect of fracking (hydraulic fracturing for oil and
gas) in the UK mainland, as well as concerns for government investment in fossil fuels
and reductions in subsidies for renewable energy. This is an example of “the spread of
anarchistic politics across the radical Left” (Luchies 2014:111) that has occurred in the
West in the last two decades and demonstrates the influence of what Gordon (2008)
terms ‘small-a’ anarchism within radical anti-authoritarian political communities; the
integration of anarchist practices and ideas without an unquestioning rigorous
adherence to anarchist political theory (see also Day 2005).

Analysis of interview and observational data, as well as detailed reading of the existing
literature, made it apparent to me that a comparison of women’s activism across two
distinct social movements was insufficiently nuanced in its approach. Instead I
observed differences to be most significant when comparing organisational types.
Consequently this chapter considers the different experiences of young women within
professional SMOs and informal activist groups, and assesses the ways in which the
women in question negotiate their gendered and political subjectivities within these
distinct spaces.

**Formal and informal spaces of activism**

The women interviewed reported participating in a wide range of activism and
belonging to multiple SMOs. The clearest distinction to be made between the types of
organisation in which they participated was between the formalised SMOs in which
some women were employed and the informal, grassroots SMOs to which they
dedicated their free time. Of the 20 women interviewed, 11 were employed by co-
operatives, charities, trade unions or NGOs whose work promoted environmental
and/or social justice. Of the remaining interviewees, 5 identified their occupations as
students and one as unemployed, leaving three women working in roles which were
not directly related to their activism. As such a significant majority of interviewees
were employed in some respect as ‘professional activists’. McCarthy and Zald (1973)
identified a rising number of paid activists as characteristic of a professionalised social
movement, resulting from increased funding drawn from sources outside of a
membership base. Staggenborg (1988) has developed this to identify the significant differences between formalised SMOs that employ paid staff and non-formalised SMOs whose work is performed by volunteers. In the case of the former, organisations have adopted or created routinized bureaucratic structures and procedures with hierarchies of leadership and decision-making and clear divisions of labour (Staggenborg 1988:589). Informal SMOs, meanwhile, have retained flexible organisational structures that are adjusted to need, loose membership affiliations and minimal division of labour (Staggenborg 1988:590).

More recently debates about the professionalization of social movements have focused on the rising dominance of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs), noting the predominance of highly visible, centralised national and international organisations whose reliance on governments, philanthropists and corporate funders for financial support has necessitated an air of legitimacy afforded by conservative organisational structures and narrow definitions of democracy (Tomlinson and Schwabenland 2010:107). Occurring amidst a contemporary neoliberal policy context, NGOisation has resulted in a surfeit of hierarchical, corporate organisations (Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013; Kamat 2004) whose primacy has been argued to “stall and obstruct processes of authentic democratisation” (Kamat 2013:ix). NGOisation has been theorised by critics as the “institutionalisation, professionalization, depoliticisation and demobilisation” of social movements (Choudry 2010: 19); “the professionalization of dissent” (Choudry and Kapoor 2013). NGOs themselves are diverse rather than singular, and their potential to serve as voices of dissent highlights their existence as politically contested sites located between the state and civil society (Kamat 2013). Nonetheless, structurally and organisationally Western NGOs are not known as innovative or experimental (Barrington-Bush 2013) and of the 7 interviewees employed by NGOs only one reported an organisational structure that was non-hierarchical.

The differences between the formalised and non-formalised SMOs in which interviewees participate as both employees and volunteers are effectively captured within Rothschild-Whitt’s (1979) typology of organisations, contrasting the rational-bureaucratic with the collectivist-democratic as ideal types (Figure 1). Differential
organisational strategies are of interest here because the women interviewed consciously reflected on the significance of hierarchical and horizontal structures for their experiences of sexism and gender inequalities. In what follows interviewees’ critiques of the structures and procedures of SMOs are considered in relation to existing critiques of gender and organisation in order to demonstrate the political nature of women’s organisational choices. Additionally, ethnographic observational and conversational data are drawn upon to illustrate strategies that exist within formal and informal activist spaces that enable women to contest gendered inequalities and highlight issues of intersectionality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Bureaucratic Organization</th>
<th>Collectivist-Democratic Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Authority</td>
<td>1. Authority resides in individuals by virtue of incumbency in office and/or expertise; hierarchical organization of offices. Compliance is to universal fixed rules as these are implemented by office incumbents.</td>
<td>1. Authority resides in the collectivity as a whole; delegated, if at all, only temporarily and subject to recall. Compliance is to the consensus of the collective which is always fluid and open to negotiation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Rules</td>
<td>2. Formalization of fixed and universalistic rules; calculability and appeal of decisions on the basis of correspondence to the formal, written law.</td>
<td>2. Minimal stipulated rules; primacy of ad hoc, individuated decisions; some calculability possible on the basis of knowing the substantive ethics involved in the situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Social Control</td>
<td>3. Organizational behavior is subject to social control; primarily through direct supervision or standardized rules and sanctions, tertiarily through the selection of homogeneous personnel especially at top levels.</td>
<td>3. Social controls are primarily based on personalistic or moralistic appeals and the selection of homogeneous personnel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Social Relations</td>
<td>4. Ideal of impersonality. Relations are to be role based, segmental and instrumental.</td>
<td>4. Ideal of community. Relations are to be holistic, personal, of value in themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Recruitment and Advancement</td>
<td>5.a. Employment based on specialized training and formal certification.</td>
<td>5.a. Employment based on friends, social-political values, personal attributes, and informally assessed knowledge and skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.b. Employment constitutes a career; advancement based on seniority or achievement.</td>
<td>5.b. Concept of career advancement not meaningful; no hierarchy of positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Incentive Structure</td>
<td>6. Remunerative incentives are primary.</td>
<td>6. Normative and solidarity incentives are primary; material incentives are secondary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Social Stratification</td>
<td>7. Isomorphic distribution of prestige, privilege, and power; i.e., differential rewards by office, hierarchy justifies inequality.</td>
<td>7. Egalitarian; reward differentials, if any, are strictly limited by the collectivity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Differentiation</td>
<td>8.a. Maximal division of labor; dichotomy between intellectual work and manual work and between administrative tasks and performance tasks.</td>
<td>8.a. Minimal division of labor: administration is combined with performance tasks; division between intellectual and manual work is reduced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.b. Maximal specialization of jobs and functions; segmental roles. Technical expertise is exclusively held; ideal of the specialist-expert.</td>
<td>8.b. Generalization of jobs and functions; wholistic roles. Decimation of expertise: ideal of the amateur factotum.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Rothschild-Whitt’s typology of organisations (1979)
Gender and structure within formalised environmental SMOs

Of the 11 women employed by social justice organisations, 7 of these worked within NGOs whose focus is explicitly, or aligned to, ecology and environmentalism. Environmental NGOs (ENGOs) play a significant role in the environmental movement, contributing to its public visibility and playing an important role in influencing environmental discourses (Eden et al 2006). In line with Rothschild-Whitt’s ideal type, most (6) of the environmental organisations that interviewees worked for were characterised by hierarchical authority and social stratification. Such organisations are usually headed by executive directors and decisions about the direction of the organisation are made by a senior management body and overseen by a board of trustees; employees further down the hierarchy have relatively little autonomy. Furthermore, those at the top of these organisations are largely homogenous in social and educational backgrounds. While the dominance of business and industry by middle-class White men is hardly news, the underrepresentation of women and people of colour in decision-making roles within environmental and development NGOs has received critical attention recently (Phillips 2013; Bola 2013; Goldenberg 2014). Reflecting on the state of environmental organisations in the United States, Goldberg (2014) identified eight of the top 10 organisations as being headed by White men. Furthermore, where women occupy leadership positions it tends to be within smaller organisations responsible for much smaller budgets. Taylor (2014) found that men dominate at the highest positions in US environmental organisations, with 70% of presidents and chairs of the board in conservation/preservation organisations being male, and men representing 76.2% of presidents and 55% of chairs of the board in environmental grant-making organisations. Ethnic diversity is worse, with ethnic minority staff not exceeding 16% of employees in environmental organisations, despite constituting 38% of the American population (Taylor 2014). There is no evidence to suggest that the situation in UK organisation is any different.

The high level of social stratification within ENGOs’ hierarchical organisations is identified in Rothschild-Whitt’s typology as acting as a form of social control whereby organisation behaviour is managed and contained. Homogeneity of organisation
leaders and managers can result in unconscious biases that serve to replicate existing power inequalities through unequal hiring and promotion policies (Taylor 2014). This situation, combined with evidence of a glass ceiling and a gendered pay gap within the non-profit sector more widely (Gibelman 2000), demonstrate the existence of forms of vertical gender and ethnic segregation that occur in the labour market at large (Razzu 2014; Browne 2006).

My research produced evidence that a lack of diversity within environmental organisations is beginning to be recognised as a problem both for individual organisations but also for the environmental movement more widely. At the annual conference of one large environmental organisation, I attended a diversity workshop during which the facilitators laid out the practical steps that are being taken within the organisation to tackle issues of exclusion and privilege. Some, such as ending all-male interview panels and speaker platforms have already been implemented but others, such as diversity in campaign planning, remained vague and underdeveloped. Furthermore, there seemed to be little clarity on whether the initiative was designed to overhaul the culture of the organisation or simply to implement a new policy: an ‘add minorities and stir’ approach. In conversation with a former employee concerns were raised that the fundamental structure of the organisation prevented any significant changes being made, as the work was not seen as important by those with the power to ensure resources and time were committed to it. Senior management were considered to have too much privilege and too little experience of oppression or diversity to have any deep motivation to push for change, while those at lower levels who were enthusiastic were too busy and unsupported to make a significant impact. Tomlinson and Schwabenland’s (2010) research into competing discourses of equality and diversity in the UK non-profit sector has highlighted the conflict between the promotion of equality as a social justice issue and the need to make a business case for increased diversity within organisations. It is not surprising, therefore, that in spite of the centrality of social justice to the mission of such organisations internal issues of equality can be neglected under utilitarian approaches. As Liam Barrington-Bush (2013) has identified in his work as an organisational change consultant, “many organisations in the social change sector [are] keen to espouse the importance of diversity, but unlikely to practice it in more than a tick-box way” (2013:98). These are
similar issues to those associated with the implementation of gender mainstreaming, specifically the way in which economic competitiveness has been prioritised ahead of gender equality (Perrons 2005); the extent to which gender mainstreaming has been enacted through the greater inclusion of women without serious attempts to address the structural nature of gendered inequalities (Daly 2005); and the dilution of gender equality goals through the use of gender mainstreaming to deliver wider policy goals such as tackling poverty (Rees 2006).

The absence of women from positions of influence and decision-making within formalised SMOs is important as it impacts upon the discourses that are produced around environmentalism. Feminist standpoint theories on the production and legitimation of knowledge emphasise the relevance of oppressed people’s experiences to understanding the world (Harstock 1983; Collins 1990). The underrepresentation of women (as well as minority ethnic, working class and non-Western people) can result in a restricted understanding of the impacts of and potential solutions to climate change and environmental degradation. In her interview, Ruth identified that environmentalism “is still a male-led movement” and problematized this situation with reference to Vandana Shiva’s work emphasising the importance of women’s knowledge in sustaining the environment:

In the past it had always been the women that collected and saved the seeds and knew what seeds were good for cooking this and were good for that and understood the qualities of them and therefore kept a wide diversity of seeds. But that wasn’t valued, you know, that was just ‘home stuff’. It wasn’t recognised as a being a life-giver and it’s now more recently when companies are coming in and the male farmers aren’t consulting the women, they’re buying in genetically modified seeds that […] die off. It’s not sustainable, it’s not going to last but they’re now starving, and if they’d consulted the women that knew, but because it’s not valued it’s not recognised.

Ruth’s categorisation of the work undertaken by women in the private sphere as ‘home stuff’ demonstrates her understanding of the way in which women’s traditionally feminine roles and the activism that they undertake in relation to them, are insufficiently valued in contrast to men’s public work. Statements such as Ruth’s demonstrate interviewees’ awareness of the importance of a diversity of perspectives.
within ENGOs and the environmental movement more widely. Ella identified how the homogeneity of those in positions of power influenced the issues that are given the most visibility within the movement by neglecting the mundane day-to-day issues that affect women in their caring roles:

If you say something as simple as having organic food people don’t think of that as being an environmental issue but it’s something that I know a lot of mothers are concerned about. People look at bigger things, like ‘let’s shut down this coal plant or this nuclear plant’ or whatever so I do think sometimes we don’t look at the whole scope within environmentalism how it can affect different people’s lives and it can be something as simple as having a community garden or talking about fuel poverty and how that’s a lot of single mums, it’s not an issue that a lot of environmentalists like to talk about.

As well as the lack of acknowledgement of women’s important private sphere activities, Ella’s statement emphasises the significance for women of their relationships to other people, particularly their roles as mothers. The conceptualisation of environmental issues in terms of large scale issues such as climate change and nuclear power risks marginalising women’s relational subjectivities as members of communities that are more local than the national or global issues attended to by much high-profile environmental campaigning.

It is not just in the higher levels of management that men dominate; throughout many environmental organisations men are overrepresented. I spoke with a member of the senior management team of one of the UK’s foremost ENGOs who has worked for a number of NGOs, who observed that in development NGOs it is common for women to constitute the majority of the workforce. As a result, he was surprised, on moving to his current position, to find that it was dominated by men. Julia, one of my interviewees, made a similar observation about her organisation, stating that “the first thing that struck me when I first joined is that there are a lot more men than in all of the other NGOs I’ve worked in.” For Julia this was symptomatic of the wider environmental movement rather than being restricted to ENGOs, but argued that male-dominance in terms of numbers does not necessarily translate directly to a macho or patriarchal environment.
The differentiation that Rothschild-Whitt (1979) identified as characteristic of bureaucratic organisations is visible in the horizontal gender segregation identified by interviewees Julia and Su within their organisations. Both identified fundraising as an area in which women make up the majority of employees, while areas associated with technical skills tended to be dominated by men. Julia noted men dominated in the logistical team responsible for facilitating direct action and ‘stunts’. They are, she explained, the people “who drive the van to the place and have all the equipment and who build stuff” in contrast to others whose work is desk-based. The physicality associated with these roles is characteristic of men’s manual occupations and is represented in Rothschild-Whitt’s typology as the dichotomy between performance and administrative tasks. Furthermore it reinforces the distinction that Ruth identified between women’s ‘home stuff’ in the private sphere and men’s public activism. While, as Julia noted, male-dominance of certain departments does not necessarily mean they are macho in nature, Su’s experience provided an alternative perspective. As a sector drawing heavily on IT skills and technological knowledge, Su identified her own area of expertise, digital campaigning, as one in which women are in the minority in most workplaces. She described how the overrepresentation of men in this department at one ENGO contributed to a distinctly “testosterone-fuelled” atmosphere which translated into campaigns which “seemed very male, very geeky”.

The specialist technical knowledge and skills associated with logistics and digital campaigning are traditionally, but not essentially, male. The “maximal specialisation of jobs and functions” (Rothschild-Whitt 1979) that characterises differentiation in bureaucratic organisations ensures that such technical knowledge is held by a specialist few, with little attempt made to educate or train others. The horizontal segregation that such organisational forms produce is visible within ENGOs as it is within the wider labour market, whereby women are most commonly employed within person-centred administrative and support roles. The horizontal and vertical gender segregation is maintained within formalised SMOs through the same processes by which it occurs within workplaces more generally, meaning that the adoption of formal bureaucratic organisational structures recreates in organizations preoccupied with social justice, internal inequalities at odds with their external mission.
In spite of her observations of horizontal gender segregation in the ENGO sector, Su nonetheless contended that gender inequality is less problematic than in other areas of the workforce. This perception mirrors Joni Seager’s statement from two decades ago that “many women who work in the environmental movement report that there is less overt sexism, more respect for them, and less pressure on them to conform to male work constructs than in more conventional businesses or organisations” (Seager 1993:175).

More importantly concrete signs are emerging that progress regarding gender equality is being made. In 2013 six young female Greenpeace activists from Europe and North America scaled the Shard tower in London to protest against, and raise awareness of, Shell’s oil drilling in the Arctic. As an environmental campaign group, Greenpeace is known for its direct action, ranging from confronting Japanese whaling ships to scaling oil rigs in the North Atlantic (Weyler 2004). However such physical and public actions have drawn criticism of machismo from both within and outside of the organisation (Zelko 2013:319; Spowers 2002:172), with accusations of “the persistence of a bar-bonding, heavy-drinking, macho boy’s sailing club at the top of the informal power structure” (Johnson 2000:62). The all-female climbing team that scaled the Shard stood in sharp contrast to the more familiar image of climate activists as, in Alex’s words, “middle-aged White men with dreadlocks”. An interview with a member of staff at Greenpeace (who remains nameless here to preserve her anonymity) revealed that the all-female climbing team was a conscious and deliberate decision that had arisen from a complaint to the organisation from a member of the public about the problematic nature of representations of direct action as a male preserve. Although such efforts to raise the profile of women’s environmental activism are laudable, that such an initiative arose not out of an internal desire for organisation change but from an external complaint suggests the type of tick-box approach to diversity identified by Barrington-Bush (2013).

A better example of more systemic cultural change that is being undertaken within the sector is People & Planet, a student campaign organisation addressing issues of human rights, world poverty and the environment. Since 2011 People & Planet have overhauled their organisational structure from a traditional bureaucratic organisation
with an executive director, to a more horizontal organisation with a mutual management structure based on a peer-management circle. Within this model, rather than management occurring hierarchically, each individual manages the person ahead of them alphabetically, and is managed by the person who precedes them alphabetically (Ramsay 2013). One of my interviewees, who I am not naming here for reasons of anonymity, works at People & Planet and described the working environment as hugely positive, linking the removal of formal hierarchies from the organisational structure to a culture of openness whereby inequalities and informal hierarchies are actively identified and addressed. On noticing that in meetings staff had a tendency to sit in gender-segregated groups she raised the issue with her colleagues. While it would not be unimaginable in other workplaces for such concerns to be dismissed or undermined, she was thanked for raising the issue and it was discussed to attempt to identify an underlying cause. While there is still a nominal separation of the employees between permanent staff (‘managers’) and those on one year (paid) internship contracts, my interviewee spoke of a working environment in which such differences are minimised through the concerted actions of employees to support colleagues and value all contributions equally. It is an environment in which, as a woman and as an employee, she feels supported:

I feel valued whenever I do speak up in meetings or I do want to make myself heard which is a really nice thing in terms of day-to-day life to feel that you’re treated equally to the people sitting next to you.

In the case of People and Planet, the removal of structural inequalities (such as unequal pay and management hierarchies) has facilitated the removal of interactional inequalities. This has enabled a culture of cooperation to develop so that openly addressing perceived problems, rather than being seen as a direct challenge to those in positions of power, is welcomed as a means of improving working conditions for everyone.

Gender and structure within grassroots groups

If environmental organisations are examples of bureaucratic structures, grassroots environmental and anarchist groups provide a counterpoint through their use of collectivist organising structures. Collectivist organising aligned with the New Left’s
embrace of participatory democracy in the 1960s (Clemens and Minkoff 2007:155) and has characterised much social movement activity since (Rothschild-Whitt 1979; Fuller 1989; Tarrow 2011). Rather than a failure to effectively organise, this style of decentralised, horizontal organising has been an active choice based on a self-conscious rejection of formalised hierarchies that characterise bureaucratic institutions (Rothschild-Whitt 1979). As Fuller (1989) identified in relation to the peace movement, collectivist organising occurs for both instrumentalist and ideological reasons but these motivations may not be separable. Collectivist organisation is argued to strengthen individual commitment, promote self-efficacy in participants, lead to more viable decisions, and result in ‘solidarity incentives’ (including self-empowerment and connection to a community) for continued participation (Fuller 1989).

Informal SMOs, while predominantly collectivist in nature, exist along a continuum with the ideal types of bureaucracy and collectivism at either end. All of the interviewees in my study reported participating in collectivist groups, although the extent to which they represented the ideal type varied. Nonetheless, participants demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the differences between formalised and informal SMOs, and of the variation between individual informal groups in terms of structure and hierarchy. Ella identified horizontal organising structures as more effective, noting that rather than occurring by chance:

> It is a conscious decision; we just find that it tends to be a better way of organising. You don’t have to worry about feeling as though one person is taking over and you don’t have to worry about having a top-down approach to things.

For Ella, such a model ensures that “everyone feels that their voice is being heard and they have a say on the decision-making of the group.” Fuller (1989) has argued that having opinions valued and recognised results in an increased sense of self-efficacy amongst participants, while consensus decision-making leads to more viable, creative and realistic strategies for action. Chrissy felt that consensus decision-making was crucial to maintaining a horizontal structure where everyone’s experience and

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5 Consensus decision-making is a participatory consent-based group process practiced by Quakers and adopted by the peace and feminist movements in the middle of the 20th century. It rejects the legitimacy of majority decisions and instead seeks to generate agreement of all participants through open discussion, allowing minority voices to have their concerns addressed and incorporated (Seeds for Change 2013).
knowledge is valued equally, ensuring that “you don’t try and become experts or elitist in any way.” Collectivist organising promotes the sharing of knowledge and skills that is identified above to be missing from bureaucratic organisations but which Chrissy has identified as crucial for the survival of the movement:

We always make sure when we’re doing trainings that there’s someone learning and someone who has done it before so that we can actually make the movement stronger by having lots of people with those skills, rather than creating this elite group who only know how it works: that’s not empowering and that’s not how to create a sustainable movement.

Although collectivist, non-hierarchical organising is considered ideal by many activists it is worth noting that at times or in certain circumstances groups deviate from the ideal type. Chrissy raised the issue of security culture impacting on the ability of the anarchist anti-fascist group that she was part of to organise in a truly non-hierarchical and open manner. The infiltration of anti-fascist groups by undercover police since the 1980s (Evans and Lewis 2013) has resulted in a degree of suspicion towards new people and a need to limit the number of people who are party to logistical information regarding targets and tactics. Chrissy explained that in such circumstances “it’s hard to find a practical balance and keep political motives for why you’re non-hierarchical.”

In Naomi’s case, while the group at the heart of a local anti-fracking campaign was theoretically horizontal and collectivist, as a newly-formed grassroots group many of its members were inexperienced and unaccustomed to this type of activism and as such there was currently a more explicit form of leadership than is typical. Referring to the group’s founders Naomi explained that,

they’re sort of leading it at the moment while it gets established. So decisions are made by consensus but the two women are planning the meetings, facilitating the meetings and driving it and directing it a bit but I know they’re both committed to horizontal organising and it’s just a pragmatic decision to get it to the right place and to get everyone involved and to become established effectively.

Broadly there was widespread support for collectivist, non-hierarchical organising structures amongst the women I interviewed and others I spoke with more informally.
Notably, several interviewees explained that they specifically seek them out these kinds of spaces to work in, eschewing more hierarchically structured formal organisations. In Catherine’s case this was habitual: “All of the groups that I’m part of [...] are organised horizontally, to an extent that I no longer really know how to defer to someone else’s decision-making.” For Sam though, recently dedicating more time to anarchist-orientated activities had resulted directly from negative experiences of the abuses of structural power by the leadership of the Socialist Workers’ Party in their handling of rape allegations against a long-standing member. Having spent five years as an SWP member she now says that “I’m open to a lot less structure than I used to be because I can see how it can be abused.” As well as participating in anarchist-oriented activist groups she also sought to challenge unquestioned hierarchical structures in other groups. At a meeting of a newly formed group that we both attended, some of the male activists present took for granted that a formalised structure would be established. However, Sam questioned why the group needed to have assigned roles and leaders in order for it to operate effectively. While the issue was not fully resolved, and could be considered symptomatic of wider issues of male privilege within the group, Sam felt it was important to make her views heard and to provide an alternative perspective.

Some of the interviewees in my study contrasted their horizontal activist groups directly with the hierarchical organisations they worked within, and identified the former as more effective, such as Jodie comparing her employer to her own activism:

[I]t is a formal charity with a trustee structure which is the most undemocratic, frustrating thing ever, I hate it [...] how I organise as an anarchist is horizontally.

While Jodie does not identify the trustee structure as frustrating specifically because it is gendered, Naomi contended that the difference between hierarchy and horizontality was the presence of problematic gender issues in the former but not the latter. Activist spaces provided a respite from the onslaught of sexism in mainstream society and served as practical examples that she would like to see replicated elsewhere:

Whereas at work [for an NGO] I can see gender issues all the time and I feel them and I’d like to see things done about them and I’m really aware of them, in these groups
it’s one of the few places where I really feel like I don’t feel those issues and I really appreciate it [...] I find these activist groups are a really safe space and demonstrate how I’d like to see it working outside of these groups.

What becomes visible here is the extent to which non-hierarchical organising forms can be seen not only as important for the movement as a form of prefigurative politics but also as playing an important role in supporting and empowering women. Studies of feminist and women’s alternative organisations identify a common opposition to hierarchy due to its association with and widespread use by patriarchal power, and position the development of flexible horizontal modes of cooperative working as explicit attempts to minimise inequalities of power and status (e.g., Oerton 1994; Iannello 1992; Rodriguez 1988). Furthermore, even within formally competitive and hierarchical settings, women have been shown to organise their work in cooperative, non-hierarchical ways that undermine existing organisational structures (e.g. Dutton 2003; Ames 1996; Pringle 1988; Langer 1972).

Critical to this capacity to empower participants is the emphasis within such groups on collective notions of power. Drawing on Starhawk’s (1987) conceptualisation of power as multifaceted, Gordon (2010) proposes a three-fold model of power that broadens traditional notions of power-as-domination. At the root of all interactions is ‘power-to’, that is, the capacity to affect the world around you. Traditional notions of power as domination are encapsulated within power-over, when power-to is exercised over others against their will, whether by force, coercion, manipulation or authority (Gordon 2010:42). Alternatively power-to can be “wielded as non-coercive influence and initiative among people who view themselves as equals” (2010:40) to produce power-with, a cooperative and productive form of power that benefits more than the individual. It is this last form of power, a power used with others rather than against them, that underlies collective, non-hierarchical organising. In emphasising power-to and power-with rather than power-over collectivist groups are able to generate a sense of individual and group efficacy (Fuller 1989).

However activists and scholars have identified that abuses of power and incidents of domination that occur along gendered lines are not wholly absent from horizontal
activist spaces (e.g. Chen et al. 2011; Gordon 2010; Lagalisse 2010; Fletcher 2009; Beallor 2001; Crass 2001; Anonymous, n.d.). During one large anarchist social gathering I witnessed the attempted silencing of women who raised concerns around the valorisation of Julian Assange by a group of men who engaged in vigorous narratives of rape denial. The men in question were verbally aggressive and one in particular accused the women of being undercover spies in an attempt to undermine their claims. A more mundane form of sexism is evident in many of the women’s accounts of meetings being dominated by men:

I have been to other gatherings and meetings and kind of have had some men pretty much attempting to force their view on the rest of the group and if you say anything back you get this whole ‘what do you know?’ kind of response back.

Ella

There often is a bit of machismo [...] in terms of how people speak in meetings and stuff, you do get the ranty manarchist type.

Zoe

The significance of Zoe’s typology of the ‘ranty manarchist type’ is explored in more depth in Chapter 8 but it is sufficient to say here that ‘manarchist’ is a term that was used by other interviewees, indicating a prevalence of men fitting the description within activist spaces. In addition to men’s domination of physical and verbal space, the persistence of horizontal gender segregation within activist groups is visible in the predominance of women in backstage movement support roles such as facilitating meetings and organising gatherings; activities that are crucial to the efficient functioning of any group but which receive little recognition as they are all too often overshadowed by men’s more public actions. At the risk of being flippant, it’s déjà vu all over again, with Ruth’s notion of ‘home stuff’ once again being significant in understanding women’s activist experiences. Jodie drew on her experience of animal rights and extreme energy activism to illustrate how this occurs:

Say you might have a march [...] and women have consistently filled those coaches to get there, done the leaflets, done the door-dropping but it might be like 5 men giving talks.
Catherine identified community organising as an area of the campaigning work she does around coal and fossil-fuel extraction where women are overrepresented and men are largely absent. In doing so she identified differences in men and women’s interests and orientations:

Every one of the nine organisers was female and there was no intention behind it. We were like “where are the men? Why does this attract women and not men? Is it because it’s about community stuff?” [...] I think there’s often a gender divide in things like the men often know things like the facts, the figures, the statistics and the women often know the emotional consequences and how it changes people’s lives.

Just as in more formal organisations, the horizontal segregation of women and men into gender-specific roles is related to skills that are considered traditionally feminine or masculine. Several interviewees identified women’s ‘soft’ skills related to emotional literacy and communication. Ruth talked about the gender split that became evident when her group organised an environmental festival. She observed a clear division of interest between the technical and the interpersonal that is outlined in the earlier discussion of formal organisations, where men’s ‘geeky’ activities are at odds with women’s ‘home stuff’:

If you think about the workshops [...] all of the ones that are like ‘this technical model for understanding this’ there’ll be a man running that, and the ‘heart and soul and are you ok?’ there’ll be a woman running that.

Similarly, Katie explained how within her group “often the men are policy-focused; women are doing much more of the communication and coordination.” In other instances, differences in activist behaviours were ascribed to physicality. Chrissy determined that the lack of women in some antifascist campaigning was related to the physical confrontation that it often involved:

I’m never going to be a street-fighter. I’m not. I’m about 5 foot and about 8 stone and it’s difficult, especially when you’ve got the older lads who have been street-fighting antifascists for the last 20 years.

Similarly Debi commented on the physical aspect of certain forms of direct action:
On black blocs\(^6\) because a lot of the activities require a first line of individuals to be taking on police beatings and running the quickest, it tends to be men at the front of the lines.

Direct action was one of the areas where issues of gender segregation were most prominent in women’s narratives of activist spaces and they illuminated the differential status afforded to certain types of action. As the discussion of Greenpeace illustrated earlier, there is a perception of direct action and public ‘stunts’ as being a masculine domain occupied by a certain kind of (male) activist and the women interviewed identified this as problematic. Chrissy, for example, referred to a tendency within antifascism to “fetishize strong men” because of the physical aspect of the activism outlined above and expressed concerns about the consequences of this for inclusivity, stating that “you can’t create a movement where it’s just big burly men.” Women activists themselves are not immune from buying into such discourses, as Jodie made clear:

> I was very much of the opinion for years that direct action was top dollar and why would I want to waste my time doing stalls when I could be doing rescues?

The high status of areas of activism in which men are overrepresented, and the corresponding low status of the caring and support work that is largely women’s domain, paints a depressingly familiar picture of informal grassroots activist organisations as spaces divided along traditionally gendered public/private lines. While the accounts from interviewees here demonstrate this to be the case at times, participants remained adamant that while not perfect, collective and non-hierarchical organising was preferable to the hierarchical alternative. Crucially, the fluidity and flexibility of such horizontal spaces is such that there is a consciously articulated desired to evolve and improve.

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\(^6\) A black bloc is a protest tactic whereby a group of protestors, dressed in black and wearing clothing such as scarves, masks, hats and sunglasses to conceal their identity, present a large anonymous mass at the front of protests. Black Blocs are rarely unified but instead consist of individuals and small affinity groups who are prepared to present a defensive front line to the police, acting as decoys and bearing the brunt of riot-control measures such as tear gas and mounted police charges. Some black blocs also adopt offensive tactics of symbolic violence such as criminal damage and destruction of property.
Practising resistance: Grassroots strategies to contest gendered inequality

While women in non-hierarchical grassroots SMOs continue to encounter gender-based inequalities they are clear that the way such groups operate is a step in the right direction. Furthermore, they readily identify examples of ongoing efforts to challenge privilege and informal hierarchies. These strategies are what I conceptualise as ‘practices of resistance’; ways of working and thinking that in their enactment aim to achieve the desired outcome of a non-oppressive way of being through the confrontation of internalized social hierarchies of oppression.

Grassroots SMOs are DiY spaces, autonomous spaces created outside of mainstream political institutions, and as such require constant management and input from participants in order to sustain them. DiY acknowledges that ready-made solutions to contemporary problems offered by institutions invested in a capitalist system of power are incompatible with movements tackling exactly that power. As such, new solutions must be created through cooperation and radical creativity. In the introduction to his edited collection on DiY culture, George McKay identifies that action is central to DiY culture and takes many forms, “from throwing a free party to setting up a long-term protest camp, from swooping en masse on a destructive quarry to producing and distributing an alternative press, from trawling round the revived summer festival circuit with your message to organising one-off spectacular stunts like climbing Big Ben” (McKay 1998:4). While McKay’s action is defined in terms of events, the DIY ethic of action extends to designing and implementing strategies that address the inequalities and imbalances of power that occur within these spaces and at these events. Central to this process is the notion of prefiguration: that rather than the ends justifying the means, the means are intended to shape the ends. As such, prefiguration, or the enactment of prefigurative politics, shifts the emphasis from an idealised future political utopia to the discourses of resistance and liberation of the present (Gordon 2005). By practising resistance the activists in my study are able to learn new ways of engaging with one another and attempt to unlearn destructive behaviours. They are resisting the easy acceptance and perpetuation of imperialist White supremacist capitalist patriarchal norms (hooks 2003:xiii) and instead rehearsing alternative, anti-oppressive modes of engagement.
Practices of resistance both result from and contribute to the “alternative subjectivities and ways of being” (Day 2005:35) that characterise the dynamic and ongoing processes of change and emancipation that are being pursued within radical political communities. Engagement with anti-oppression discourses and pedagogies are by no means universal features of grassroots politics on the Left, yet intersectional critiques of power and domination drawn from anarchist, peace, feminist and civil rights movements are increasingly being wielded as effective counterhegemonic discourses to address privilege and inequalities manifesting inside and outside of social movements (Luchies 2014). The strategies and tools developed from these understandings of power are as multiple as the forms of oppression they are designed to address and depend on a concerted and ongoing effort from members of activist communities to be willing to interrogate their own prejudices and behaviours.

Contrary to equal opportunities and non-discrimination policies implemented within formalised organisations which are all too often introduced and rarely revisited, the prefigurative nature of anti-oppression strategies within grassroots SMOs recognises that such work needs to be ongoing, dynamic, proactive and importantly, the responsibility of all involved. Research by Ely and Meyerson (2010) has demonstrated the potential for organisational cultures to equip men to engage in a process of ‘undoing gender’ by emphasising collective goals with which masculinist gender performances are incompatible. Anarchistic grassroots SMOs are increasingly recognising that struggles against capitalism, state power and environmental destruction cannot be achieved without an ongoing commitment to collective liberation from all forms of intersecting oppressions (e.g. Luchies 2014; Chen et al 2011; Morris 2010; Shannon and Rouge 2009; LA Coil n.d). In such cases macho and sexist (as well as racist, dis/ableist, homophobic and cisnormative) behaviours are identified as compromising the possibility of achieving movements’ wider goals. That such cultural change needs to be continually ongoing is addressed by Ely and Meyerson’s (2000) consideration of achieving gender equity in organisations, effectively describing but not naming prefigurative praxis: “Gender and its role in organisational life is a process whereby organisational members continuously identify and disrupt oppressively gendered practices in [p130] organisations and revise them accordingly. Because we are limited in our vision of a gender equitable state by the
gender relations of which we are currently a part, we cannot anticipate what precisely a transformed end-state looks like and suggest instead that a process of transformation – of resistance and learning – continues indefinitely and itself constitutes the gender equity goal” (Ely and Meyerson 2000:129-130).

Examples of the kinds of resistive practices encountered by both my interviewees and myself are multiple but worth exploring in more detail to demonstrate the ways in which they enable challenges to be made to hegemonic political and gender constructions. Two of these practices of resistance – horizontal, non-hierarchical organising and consensus decision-making – have been highlighted in this chapter already, yet individual practices rarely occur in isolation and instead these tools for anti-oppression work should be considered to function together to create a prefigurative culture of resistance.

**Independent media and cultural production**

Anti-oppressive discourses circulate between movement actors and within networks through the use of independent media and DiY cultural production. The radical potential of the internet is as useful for anarchist and environmental movements as it is for any others, with independent news outlets such as Indymedia and SchNEWS sitting alongside the millions of individuals using social media such as Twitter, Facebook and blogs to disseminate updates on the latest campaigns and personal accounts of events and activism. Self-publishing of zines, pamphlets and articles, both in print and online, facilitates the dissemination of counter-narratives to mainstream norms around issues such as women’s political identities, body image and sexual violence. Furthermore, they provide spaces to provoke discussion and to critique events by addressing movement issues such as sexism, intimate partner violence, racism and burn-out. The ease with which such documents can be produced and distributed is such that a plurality of narratives can flourish. Several of my interviewees referenced their engagement with zines, praising them as cheap and effective ways of both communicating and consuming non-mainstream information, while Jodie was producing her own zine about women’s incarceration informed by her experiences in prison. The presence of several zines in the reference list of this thesis, as well as in the works of the likes of Luchies (2014) and Richie (2008), amongst others, is testament to
the significant role they play in the transmission of counterhegemonic knowledge within activist networks (see also Atkinson and Dougherty 2006; Downing 2001; Duncombe 1997).

Workshops
While the emphasis in the naming of anarchist book fairs may be on written material, as largely social events the use of spaces for discussion is much more significant. At the 6 anarchist book fairs I attended during this research, there were always scheduled workshops addressing anti-oppression politics, tackling issues such as anarchafeminism, asylum seekers’ rights, reproductive justice, sexual consent, queering anarchism, sex workers’ rights, and mental health. Workshops serve as effective spaces for attempting to understand and address privilege and oppression from different perspectives, and five of my interviewees referred to workshops they had attended in their interviews. Additionally, workshops are run not only at book fairs but are organised by groups or hosted at events where a need is identified, whether that may be as a response to specific incident, or as an ongoing strategy of movement-building and anti-oppression pedagogy.

Skill sharing
Skill shares (both formal and informal) are one of the key ways in which grassroots SMOs address the specialisation of knowledge and skills that can lead to gendered segregation of activist roles. Skill shares recognise that skills are non-zero sum resources (Gordon 2010:48), that is, skills, particularly those relevant to and necessary for activism and direct action (such as climbing, building compost toilets, locking on using arm tubes etc), are not finite, rather they can be taught and learned and in the process the total quantity of knowledge is increased. The sharing of knowledge and skills increases the efficacy of groups and builds solidarity by uniting individuals in the name of a larger goal. Zoe described how her experience of a skill-sharing activity had none of the macho posturing that she had encountered in other areas of anarchist activism:
I did try and do climbing at an anarchist skill-share a week or two weeks ago and it was quite funny because it was with people who were really trying to not be either manarchist or patronising, but I’m dreadful at climbing [...] so a lot of the men had to reluctantly hold on to me to support me to get up the rope and the way they did that like ‘oh no, we’re not oppressing’.

While Zoe admitted feeling a bit embarrassed at her experience she was relieved to find that no-one associated her inability to climb with her being a woman, thereby refusing to reinforce stereotypes of women’s physical frailty. Catherine’s description of a more informal experience of skill-sharing demonstrates the way in which such practices encourage a participatory and inclusive approach to learning:

I really enjoyed the atmosphere on that site because I went to ask someone about how you tie off lashings because I couldn’t remember, and she was very competent, and did it in a lovely inclusive way. She didn’t just go ‘use a clove hitch’ which is the sort of thing I’ve had before and I’m like well what does that mean? She was just like ‘ooh, I’m not really sure, let’s do it’ and then started lashing stuff and then had this whole crowd of people and everyone else got involved.

Skill shares work not only to develop concrete physical skills but also to build the confidence necessary to putting them into action. My own experience of ‘lock on’ training at an environmental protest camp demystified the mechanics of locking onto objects and individuals using arm tubes (the trick, I learned, was climbing carabiners). Being able to practise the process repeatedly, at varying speeds, and with a cooperative and willing partner, meant that not only did I know how to do it but I was confident that I would be able to do it, at speed, in a protest situation.

**Safer spaces**

Safer spaces policies list the behaviours and actions that organisers or group members have collectively decided will not be tolerated and to which individuals agree on entering the space. They may also outline responses that will be made where the policy is breached. By making collective decisions about expected conduct, individuals may find it easier to challenge the behaviour of others without feeling that they will be undermined, dismissed or suffer negative consequences. Safer spaces policies, and the discourses of power and privilege that inform them, recognise that all participants
should feel comfortable within activist spaces and that no-one should be subjected to abuse or discrimination on the basis of gender, sexuality, age, disability, ethnicity or any other aspect of their identity. However, in contrast to equalities policies within hierarchical organisations, safe spaces policies make it the responsibility of everyone to challenge oppressive behaviours where they occur.

At the aforementioned anarchist social gathering where women experienced abusive behaviour from a limited number of male attendees, it was notable that no safer spaces policy had been designed or implemented. As such, when the women who had been targeted attempted to raise a grievance there was no clear process by which it could be addressed or resolved. In contrast, I witnessed an occasion at a protest camp where concerns were raised over the behaviour of a man who was acting in a sexually aggressive manner. As part of the organisation of the camp a specific team of individuals had been formed whose role was to maintain a peaceful and safe environment, and it was this team who were called upon to address the man’s behaviour. In outlining the requirements of individuals occupying the space and the areas in which the man’s behaviour had crossed certain boundaries of acceptability, the team were able to remove the man from the camp by invoking a mandate afforded to them by the camp as a whole.

Zoe highlighted the existence of accountability processes around sexual violence within anarchist movements but questioned how effectively these would be put into practice should the need occur, a question that was explored in more detail by Debi, who in speaking about the accountability process at her social centre emphasised that it is a work in progress:

We basically have a tiered system as it stands here for bands and the bar at the social centre that says that if you violate something of a sexual nature that has to do with gender politics and things like that it’s sort of an automatic ban and then it’ll be reviewed. You’re fucking gone and then we can work on it from there and if you’re willing to work with us that’s fine. But it’s treated as something completely separate because we don’t have a better method and because I don’t think it’s ok to say ‘well we’re definitely going to talk this through’. There needs to be a definite separation and I don’t think there’s a better way right now but there needs to be an element where the most important thing is keeping the
space open to survivors and to women who will hear that we’re keeping this dude in this space.

What becomes clear from Debi’s quote is the partial, incomplete nature of these practices of resistance; their efficacy can only be judged by their implementation and as such they require constant revision and reconsideration to ensure that they are challenging rather than perpetuating oppressive behaviours.

**Conclusion**

This chapter began with an acknowledgement of the problematic distinction between women’s experiences of activist spaces by comparing two different social movements, acknowledging the spread of ‘anarchistic politics’ and highlighting the intersection of anarchism and environmentalism within the environmental direct action movement. In order to effectively analyse women’s experiences of social movement organising I have instead juxtaposed formalised and grassroots organisations, with the former tending towards bureaucratic, hierarchical organisational structures comparable to those common within business and industry. In contrast the defining feature of the majority of informal social movement organisations participated in by interviewees is their explicitly cooperative and non-hierarchical approach to organisation. While variations exist in the extent to which organisations conform to these ideal types, the distinction is useful in highlighting the impact of organisational structure for women’s experiences of gendered inequality and sexism.

The high proportion of interviewees who worked for campaigning organisations was noted as a point of interest, and while I do not attempt to argue that their form of employment is representative of young female activists more widely, it is the case that young women constitute a high proportion of junior staff of ENGOs (Külcür 2012). The professionalization of social movements has created a growing sector of ‘professional activists’ who earn their living through campaigning on political and social issues, with many of these, including 7 of my interviewees, working for NGOs. The bureaucratic and hierarchical nature of the ENGOs that interviewees worked for was situated within a neoliberal policy context where a process of NGOisation has resulted in the formalisation of certain social movement organisations as a means to appear more
palatable to the governments and other stakeholders with whom they are engaging. The formal nature of these organisational structures is such that despite the social justice nature of their work, gender and ethnic diversity in the higher echelons of their management is ultimately limited and as such has consequences for the adequate representation of women’s experiences among practices and policies. This is a particularly pressing problem for the environmental movement and has implications for the efficacy of addressing climate change, a crisis that disproportionately affects women as the poorest members of societies across the world (Alston and Whittenbury 2013; Goh 2012).

Interviewees’ experiences of gendered inequalities within formalised organisational contexts were most readily apparent in their descriptions of horizontal occupational segregation and the identification of women’s overrepresentation in areas that can be considered feminised, such as fundraising and administration, which are aligned with skills developed within the private sphere. Furthermore, the specialisation of technical skills maintains these divisions, resulting at times in restrictive gender representations of climate activists as “middle-aged White men with dreadlocks”, as Alex put it, and contrasting women’s ‘home stuff’ with the ‘geeky’ activities of male activists. While progress on this front has been hinted at by Greenpeace’s ‘Ice Climb’ stunt, as well as the mixed-gender crew of the Arctic Sunrise whose arrest in Russia in 2013 drew worldwide attention, evidence of significant cultural change within such organisations is limited. However, where systemic changes have been implemented, as in the case of People and Planet, there appears to be a much greater willingness to address inequalities at all levels of interaction. While hierarchies reinforce and normalise inequalities, a commitment to a non-hierarchical way of organising opens up potential spaces in which to challenge other manifestations of privilege and oppression.

Interviewees identified and named aspects of grassroots organising (such as non-hierarchical organisational structures, consensus decision-making, accountability procedures, and skill shares) that they believed differentiated their activist groups from formalised SMOs and which addressed the structures of power that entrench privilege in activist spaces. In doing so they demonstrated literacy around practices of anti-oppression, as well as sophisticated conceptualisation of how their own gendered
experiences of social movement organising fit within wider structures of privilege and inequality, in particular in their reference to ‘ranty manarchist types’ and the valorisation of macho direct action ‘stunts’.

Grassroots SMOs that engage in anti-oppression work mount a direct challenge to the existing gender regime by demanding and instituting a fairer experience for women and minorities. They act to challenge and change the current status quo regarding both mainstream expectations of women’s political participation and internal structures of inequality in a form of prefigurative praxis that refuses to defer collective liberation until after the ‘revolution’. Despite interviewees’ references to experiences and observations of gender inequality and sexism as part of their activist life-histories, they continue to engage in these groups and are largely positive about their participation because of greater willingness to address oppression that exists within these spaces than within mainstream society. The practices of resistance that these young women engage with on a daily basis permit and encourage an active participation in and contribution to the political lifeworld. As the next chapter will identify, such practices are also implicated in young women’s challenges to gendered norms of political participation, enabling their reinscription of femininity and womanhood as agentic and politically engaged.
Chapter 7
Doing Gender and Femininity in Social Movements

Introduction: Doing, undoing and redoing gender

Having considered the journeys that young women take to political activism, and the dynamics of the political organisations to which they belong, this chapter now focuses on how the ways in which women enact gender as activists informs and is informed by their gendered and political subjectivities with specific reference to dress, appearance and embodiment. As I demonstrate, the oppositional political cultures of anarchist and environmental social movements provide spaces for the production of oppositional gender regimes and create opportunities to rework and reframe gender identities through dress and physical action. However, as accounts of women’s experiences of these spaces will demonstrate, such oppositional gender regimes are insufficiently realised and as such female activists exhibit complex and at times contradictory relationships with femininity and the embodiment of political womanhood.

In their seminal 1987 article, West and Zimmerman present a theory of gender as performative and interactional that in the nearly three decades since its introduction has been widely taken up by gender scholars (Deutsch 2007). Central to the ‘doing gender’ thesis is the notion that rather than a characteristic to be possessed, gender is instead an outcome that is achieved through interaction with others; it is “an ongoing activity embedded in everyday interaction” (West and Zimmerman 1987:130). Through the process of ‘accountability’, the behaviour of individuals is judged by both the self and others in the extent to which it represents normative conceptions of men and women through enactments of masculinity or femininity. What constitutes normative conceptions of gender is culturally and historically contingent, varying within a time by class and ethnicity. I would argue that such conceptions and the interactional production of gender are enacted within a structural framework conceived by Connell (1987) as a gender order, or more locally as a gender regime, with a neoliberal postfeminist gender order currently dominating contemporary gender relations as discussed in Chapter 2. Having reviewed the current state of research that utilises the ‘doing gender’ thesis, Deutsch (2007) has called for the focus of scholarly work to be
redirected to studying those interactions and institutions in which resistance to normative conceptions of gender is enacted.

Risman (2009) has argued for a recognition of changing gender structures and the possibilities that these present not only for gender to be done differently, but for it to be undone in ways that reflect women’s changing status in the world. As she contends, “gender structure is not static. Young people today, especially girls, are much freer to develop their potentials beyond the cage of traditional femininity than in the past.” (Risman 2009:83). Deutsch (2007) similarly calls for ‘undoing gender’ to be used to refer to social interactions through which gender differences are reduced or minimised. However, the possibility of ‘undoing gender’ has been questioned by West and Zimmerman (2009) themselves, arguing that Risman’s theory is only possible in conceptualisations of ‘doing gender’ that neglect the centrality of accountability. Regardless of the shifting normative conceptions of gender, individuals remain accountable to sex role categorisations made by both themselves and others. West and Zimmerman (2009:118) instead argue that rather than becoming irrelevant, accountability shifts, meaning that “gender is not undone so much as redone.” The doing gender thesis resonates with the accounts that interviewees provided of experiencing themselves as gendered beings, but also of deploying particular gender performances with an appreciation of their audience. As such I utilise this approach both in its understanding of gender as a performance, but also in relation to the notion of accountability and the way in which gender performances are assessed by the self and others as they conform to normative femininity within particular institutional contexts.

Even though women may attempt to negate their gender through their dress or behaviour, the process of ‘determining gender’ (Westbrook and Schilt 2014) engaged in by others may afford primacy to their sex categorisation. In such situations although, for example, my interviewee Debi may present as androgynous, with short hair, masculine clothes and a confidence and outspokenness alien to emphasised femininity, as one of the only women in a room of men she has been spoken down to, talked over, and expected to take the minutes of the meeting. As she said, “there are a couple of reasons why someone is ignoring you and it’s so clearly that one of them is
that you’re a woman.” This effectively illustrates West and Zimmerman’s (1987:134) original contention that “women can be seen as unfeminine but that does not make them ‘unfemale’” and as such throughout this chapter I consider the multiple ways in which women negotiate and rework femininity and womanhood to be examples of ‘redoing gender.’

**Embodying gender: Dress and physicality**

The prevailing gender order of a culture is experienced within specific communities or organisations in the form of a gender regime which structures internal gender relations and is upheld and reinforced by discourses and practices. While Connell’s work on gender hegemony has been widely taken up within gender scholarship, the multiplicity of femininities operating within such a system has been somewhat overlooked (Schippers 2007). Hegemonic masculinity subordinates and marginalises other masculinities but Connell (1987) has argued that a hegemonic femininity is not possible because women always remain subordinate to men regardless of their position relative to other women. Schippers (2007), however, has attempted to redefine the concept of hegemonic masculinity so as to enable the conceptualisation of hegemonic femininity that “consists of the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (2007:94). In doing so she develops an understanding of a hierarchy of femininities which privileges some women over others while endorsing the legitimacy of the gender order.

To maintain the dominance of hegemonic masculinity it is necessary that the performance of ‘masculine’ behaviours by women should be sanctioned. Examples of masculine behaviours that are stigmatised when displayed by women include promiscuity, aggression, authority, and sexual attraction to women. Schippers (2007) terms these castigated embodiments of masculine behaviour, over which hegemonic femininity can dominate, ‘pariah femininities’. The term ‘subordinated femininities’ is eschewed not only for its failure to recognise that all femininities are ultimately subordinate but also to highlight the way in which such behaviours threaten the idealised relationship between masculinity and femininity (Schippers 2007:95).
Schippers has also proposed the possibility of alternative masculinities and femininities that are “discursively valued traits and practices in women and men that do not articulate a complementary relation of dominance and subordination between women and men” (2007:98). Her study of alternative masculinities and femininities in the alternative hard rock scene (Schippers 2002) emphasises the salience of the context in which these constructions occur.

In light of this it can be argued that the oppositional political nature of social movement cultures present potential spaces in which women and men can formulate alternative femininities and masculinities that deviate from the gender hegemony. Protest and activism can therefore act as sites where notions of femininity and womanhood can be unpicked and reformulated against social norms. Deutsch (2007) has observed that the majority of studies that utilise the ‘Doing Gender’ model have focused on the contexts in which gender norms are reproduced, providing little insight into the extent to which resistant acts can affect gender discourses or provide alternatives to normative conceptions of gender (2007:121). While feminist consciousness can be produced through resistance to normative gendered behaviour (Deutsch 2007:121) it should also be argued that the process can occur in the opposite direction. An existing feminist consciousness, such as that possessed by many of the women interviewed here, can result in a sense that they are entitled to challenge boundaries regarding conventional gendered behaviour. Feminist discourses provide the intellectual and ideological impetus to attempt to redo gender as part of a political project of the self. By intentionally disrupting the congruence between sex category and gender, women can create a cognitive dissonance that challenges taken for granted norms of women’s behaviour and establishes counter-hegemonies regarding women’s political subjectivities.

West and Zimmerman’s theorisation of gender as something achieved through interaction emphasises the institutional character of the enterprise (1987:136), necessitating an attention to the institutional contexts for redoing gender. As Hollander (2013) has argued in her study of women’s self-defence classes, situated expectations of gendered behaviour can override normative mainstream ideals, reflecting the specific local gender regime. But importantly these expectations once
integrated into the gender ideology of the individual can be seen to transcend the specific situation, influencing their behaviour and response to gendered expectations in other contexts (Hollander 2013:15). In Hollander’s study, students’ altered understandings of gender (for example, that women need not be timid or physically passive) have an observable impact on their expectations of their own and other women’s behaviour not only within the self-defence classes (that they will shout loudly and not be afraid to express anger), but also in everyday situations (being assertive and challenging perceived sexism). As such the redoing of gender can be considered as constitutive of, and constituted by, subjectivity.

**Dressing the Part**

Subcultural studies of skateboarding (Kelly et al 2005), roller derby (Finley 2010) and punk (LeBlanc 1997) have identified alternative spaces as conducive to the reformulation of femininity. Such subcultures are host to localised counter-hegemonic gender regimes wherein the hegemonic ideology of mainstream gender culture is challenged. More than just rejecting the dominant norms of the wider culture, such counter-hegemonies actively seek to undermine these ideologies and create realistic alternatives through praxis. Although both subcultures and social movements offer alternative cultures to the mainstream, where social movement spaces can be seen to differ from subcultural spaces is in their explicitly political orientation. While social movement participants engage in leisure practices with fellow activists, neither leisure nor recreation are the primary focus of such spaces, with movements instead oriented to a social change agenda.

The critique of consumer capitalism is integral to much contemporary anarchist and environmental discourse and as such shapes the praxis of many anarchistic groups. While in mainstream culture women’s hyper-feminine self-presentation is celebrated and rewarded, the counter-hegemony of anarchism views the acceptance of mainstream beauty standards as the politically naïve behaviour of passive dupes of consumer society (Lagalisse 2010). Not only, therefore, is the act of rejecting lipstick and heels not subject to sanctions or stigma but it is instead actively endorsed by the movements’ ideology. As my interviewee Catherine explained, her personal style
reflects “how I feel about consumerism and advertising and capitalism and how women are supposed to present and what makes us important in society.”

Furthermore, the physical, active and public nature of much activism is such that mobility, warmth and anonymity are often important, presenting priorities that override concerns of looking fashionable, professional or sexy. Several interviewees discussed their clothing choices in practical terms, relating dress to the physicality of their activism. Zoe, for example, explained how comfort and practicality were crucial considerations for certain types of activism:

If it’s like a sort of march, or something which involves moving around a lot, or sitting on the ground in kettles and things then I would want to be in trousers because I wouldn’t want to be faffing with stuff.

Similarly, Catherine attributed her androgynous style of jeans, fleeces and boots to practical concerns:

The way in which I dress and the way in which I present is all about practicality and how lazy I am and I have dreadlocks and I think that makes a difference to what people think.

In my own case, packing for an environmental protest camp involved multiple considerations: layers were important considering the fickle British weather; I would need sturdy boots that were waterproof and would protect my feet if trodden on by crowds or police; I would need enough pockets to store items like water, a notepad, and the eternal activist essential, roll-ups. I had no need for my make-up bag and its extensive contents, nor would I need to worry about styling my hair as I was content to wrap it in a scarf for the duration. Reflecting on this process, it is apparent to me that while much of the way I dressed and presented myself was related to the practicalities of living in a field out of a rucksack and dressing in a tent, I was also influenced by the expectations of dress for activists in such situations. Or rather, I was released from the expectations of how women should dress in everyday life. Make-up, smart clothes, styled hair, freshly-cleansed sweet-smelling skin – these things were not expected of me and I readily seized the opportunity to cast them off. The performative expectations of the postfeminist masquerade (McRobbie 2007) addressed in Chapter 2 did not apply in this space, replaced instead by an alternative dress code that
emphasised a rejection of consumer culture and an embrace of ideals of sustainability and ecological political consciousness.

The existence of a dress code within activist communities should not be too surprising in light of subcultural theory addressing the production of collective identities through dress (e.g. Hebdidge 1979; Muggleton 2000). Indeed, the existence of an activist style or aesthetic was acknowledged by several interviewees and sheds some light on the potential that such communities provide for embodying a femininity that deviates from the cultural norm. Anarchist book fairs were without doubt the arenas in which the activist aesthetic was most visible due, in part, to the large number of attendees within a relatively small space. The sea of black hoodies, particularly at the larger book fairs, is a sight to behold and worthy of a more detailed description from one particular fair.

Men’s outfits fitted largely into two different categories, related to age. Younger men were often monochrome in a ‘uniform’ of black skinny jeans (tears and patches optional), black t-shirt and a black hoodie. Some wore grey, red or blue t-shirts, often with the name of a (punk) band or a campaign. Older men (40+) tended to wear jeans (blue or black, not as narrow or tight-fitting as younger men) or cords, with shirts and fleeces. Colours for older men tended towards blues, greens and brown, with occasional maroon. Women on the other hand presented in a much wider range of styles. There is a generic female anarchist outfit consisting of black skinny jeans, t-shirt and hoodie, very similar to the generic male anarchist outfit but with flashes of colour. There were also quite a few women whose appearance was not typically anarchist. One woman, for example, wore a polo neck, A-line skirt, tights and ballet pumps. Others wore dresses, or cut off shorts over tights. Colours were much more plentiful, although there is a noticeable aversion to pink. In fact anything ‘too feminine’ seems to be avoided – jewellery is worn but it is large, or spiky, or leather. Few women wear make-up. Hair where dyed is black or faded neon; styles are simple, or incorporate shaved sections. No-one looks too smart or preened, and clothes are worn, lived-in or a bit scruffy. All shoes are flat.

(Researcher’s notes, November 2013)

Michelle had a similar experience at another book fair where she was surprised to find so many people wearing black. She described her experience thus: “[We] went to the
anarchist book fair and my friend was like ‘oh my god I’m not dressed appropriately’… no-one told us there was a dress-code.” Beyond anarchist book fairs, Zoe identified an activist aesthetic amongst the women she knows, explaining how

There is like some sort of body/look consensus going on, like they have short hair, they also wear boots, they probably also don’t wear much make-up or if they do somehow it’s transgressive, it’s sparkly and it’s going to a queer night, it’s a bit different.

For Zoe this kind of look represents a considered engagement with femininity – “it’s not a total rejection of femininity but it’s definitely not fitting into a conventional model of femininity.” Rather than fully embracing or rejecting conventional feminine representations, they are taken as things to be played with and reworked. Zoe identifies how her own femininity, and that of others she knows, represents a point on a spectrum, a position defined by its relation to an idealised form of femininity:

It’s on a spectrum isn’t it, like I do wear skirts quite a lot, I tend not to shave my armpits or legs, I don’t own any make-up, I don’t really know how to apply it.

So while Zoe may wear a form of clothing closely tied to feminine embodiment, her refusal to conform to a contemporary cultural norm of an absence of body hair represents a disjuncture that separates her engagement with femininity from the ideal of emphasised femininity. In a context where pornified popular culture expects young women to be passive and hairless (Levy 2006; Dines 2010; Walter 2010), a short skirt worn with Dr Martens (red, in Zoe’s case) and hairy armpits refuses to engage in emphasised femininity’s compliance with the needs of men’s egos. Furthermore, the unashamed exhibition of body hair can be viewed as an expressly political act in its confrontation of the taken-for-granted construct of a demarcation between the sexes (Toerien and Wilkinson 2003).

A further example of this reworking of femininity comes from Lena, who described her relationship with femininity as “vexed but also something I derive pleasure from. It’s not something that I completely reject and feel stressed out about.” On the occasions she ‘does’ femininity, she describes this performance as parodic:
I do it by performing them to an extent that it becomes like a pastiche, like the red lipstick thing and the pretty 50s dresses.

These engagements with femininity are occurring within a context where neoliberal postfeminist discourses emphasise the ‘choices’ open to young women in the new gender landscapes of Western democracies (Budgeon 2014). They are encouraged to engage in a process of self-construction (resulting in the formation of ‘choice biographies’ (Harris 2004a)) that sees everything from education and employment to personal ‘style’ and enhancement of the body through cosmetic surgery as a representation of freedom and individual agency. As such, the reworking of feminine performances by some of my participants could be considered to reflect the individualist narratives of choice that are favoured by many young women (e.g. Rich 2005; Baker 2008). In these narratives traditional aspects of femininity are embraced alongside individualistic notions of empowerment, achievement and self-reliance in such a way that associations with gender subordination are complicated (Budgeon 2014:320). As such, wearing dresses and red lipstick no longer need be tied so inextricably to the perfectly presented, and ultimately passive, model of the 1950s housewife because, to be glib, ‘feminism has happened and inequality has been overcome’.

However, as numerous feminist scholars have argued (e.g. Genz 2009; Baker 2008; Gill and Scharff 2011; Budgeon 2014 etc), the denial of gender inequality does not negate its significance for the everyday lived experiences of women and postfeminist individualism provides no critical tools with which to examine and deconstruct the structures that maintain such inequality. This is where I believe the actions of my participants differ from those of many women studied to date. Although McNay has cautioned against viewing “resignification per se as inherently subversive” (1999:181), these are women whose political identities are informed by and developed through progressive gender socialisation and positive educational experiences (as highlighted in Chapter 5), and feminist theory and practice (as addressed in Chapter 8). As a result these women are, in certain ways, more ‘gender mobile’ than many other young women. Furthermore, their occupation of social movement spaces and the political ideologies inherent therein are such that the new femininities participants are
constructing and performing eschew the emphasis on individualism at the heart of many other ‘new’ femininities (Genz 2009; Gill and Scharff 2011). The significance placed on collectivist feminist identities (which will be addressed more fully in Chapter 8) is such that these women readily identify instances and issues of gendered inequality within a wider intersectional political ideology. As the ‘wilful women’ introduced in Chapter 5, they are able to recognise their own privilege while still insisting on, and working for, political change by championing ideals of mutuality, collectivity and diversity. Rather than espousing a postfeminism in which individual liberation can be found in high heels and lipstick, these women recognise their performance of femininity as inherently constructed and tied in with a structural system of gender differentiation that needs to be dismantled. In their engagements with femininity they are expressing what Linda Alcoff (1988) terms ‘intentionality’; for Alcoff the production of subjectivity occurs “not by external ideals, values and material causes, but by one’s subjective engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance to the events of the world” (1988:97). It is this intentionality that characterises wilful women in their conscious and forthright engagement with structural and cultural inequalities. By critically engaging with the practices, discourses and institutions of gender these young women are constructing politicised subjectivities that, as the rest of this chapter will illustrate, make their ‘choices’ relevant beyond the individual.

**Doing credibility by doing gender**

Although anarchist and environmental social movements provide activist women with political discourses with which they can conceptualise and enact a feminine embodiment that challenges mainstream norms of femininity, being female in activist communities is not straightforward. The oppositional, counter-hegemonic gender regimes that characterise these spaces are often not fully realised and as such women remain conspicuous as ‘bodies out of place’. Just as the female MPs interviewed by Nirmal Puwar (2004b) experienced in the House of Commons, social movement spaces can be structured as overwhelmingly male and as such female activists can be perceived as ‘space invaders’ (Puwar 2004a), conspicuous by their corporeal novelty.

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7 Or more specifically, White, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied and male.
In spite of the anti-oppression work being done within many activist groups, as identified in Chapter 6, women’s success in being respected as credible and authentic activists often relies on nuanced and reflexive performances of gender. As Puwar identifies, “located in an organisation based on a masculine performance, a fine balanced fusion of femininity and masculinity has to be enacted” (2004b:75).

Concerns about being taken seriously as an activist were a common theme to emerge from my interview and observation data. During a workshop about gender and social movements at an anarchist book fair, one young woman reflected on how since participating more in anarchist activism she had become increasingly conscious of the messages her choice of clothing sent to people. While she used to regularly wear bright and/or floral fabrics she now found herself wearing them less frequently, concerned that she may not be taken seriously if she presented herself as too conventionally feminine. Maltry and Tucker’s (2003) study of gender identities within lesbian subcultures identified the “existence of a heavily policed authentic lesbian identity based on various versions of masculinity” (2003:90) and a similar phenomenon is identifiable within certain parts of the radical activist Left. It is this phenomenon that informs my interviewee Megan’s experience of thinking twice about wearing a new pink coat to a meeting of her group because she was not sure it projected credibility. However, in Megan’s case it is not just feminine gender that compromises her activist credibility, but also her youth. As a member of the same group I know how experienced and well-respected Megan is among her fellow activists, but the age differential between Megan and the rest of the group (me being the exception) suggests that her concern not only related to her credibility as a woman but as a young woman. Gordon’s (2007) identification of age as an axis of inequality that holds considerable significance for young people participating in political organisations has resonance here, regardless of Megan’s formalised adult status.

While it is a colour with strong associations to other social movements, specifically Gay Rights and the Gulabi Gang in India in my experience pink is not a colour commonly

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8 The Gulabi Gang is a group of women activists from Uttar Pradesh in India led by Sampat Pal, whose activism confronts abuses of male power such as domestic violence and police corruption using what some have labelled vigilante justice. The women are identifiable by their uniform of pink saris from which their name derives: Gulabi being the Hindi word for pink (Fontanella-Kahn 2013).
worn by anarchist or environmental activists in the UK. Pink is a colour associated with
girlhood, rejected by the young women in Gleeson and Frith’s study as “passive, innocent, asexual and immature” (2004:105). Furthermore, the commodification of pink by companies from Disney to Playboy, through the pink-washing of cancer research charities, is such that its semiotic association with capitalist heteronormative femininity is largely avoided by women in the movements I studied because it does not convey an appropriately political, credible version of womanhood. As Zoe said, “Girly isn’t a positive kind of, ‘she’ll get things done, she’s reliable, she’s got her radical head screwed on’ adjective at all.”

Female activists have to negotiate a complex terrain of femininity and womanhood when it comes to their appearance and, as such, their activist credibility is often a preoccupation. In addition to the cases above, I heard from women during my participant observation who had their dedication and activist credentials called into question because they were considered “too happy and smiley” and because their clothes were too bright. For some women this is a state of affairs that they feel confident addressing head-on, such as Beth, whose decision to wear a yellow dress to a large protest was a response to her sense that “femininity wasn’t respected in anarchist spaces […] it’s like to be an anarchist you can’t be feminine.” However, the pervasiveness of these sorts of attitudes is not always instantly apparent. A particularly damning example of the hostility that women may face came from Jodie, who related the sense of shock and betrayal she felt at discovering that the men she had worked alongside for years in an animal liberation group had consistently referred to her as “Bimbo”. Her youth, gender and beauty overrode the time and dedication she had given to the group, a state of affairs crystallised by the fact that the revelation came during a court case where she was on trial, along with other members of the group, for crimes committed for the liberation cause. Sadly for Jodie, this was not an isolated incident, describing how she had also been introduced by someone as “the pin-up of the animal rights movement”.

As Jodie’s experience demonstrates, being perceived to be attractive as an activist woman makes it difficult to be taken seriously and to have your skills and abilities respected. Ella observed that physical beauty can detract from the work that they do,
noting how she has known women who are criticised by others who comment that “they’re really pretty and always get the press attention but don’t know what they’re talking about”. Ella’s response was critical, stating that “It’s an unfair criticism, are you just saying it because they’re attractive?” For Lena, being attractive is a double bind, conferring status in some respects but disadvantaging her in others:

People talk to you more if your hair is done nice and you’re wearing make-up and you’re attractive basically, in a standard feminine way [but] there’s a slight resentment of dressing in a particular way and conforming to a certain extent to a particular mode of femininity and looking pretty [...] like you’re trying to manipulate them.

In spite of the possibilities, the potential for alternative political cultures to produce counter-hegemonies relating to gender roles and performances should not be overstated. Such cultures are not hermetically sealed – they do not exist apart from or in isolation from the dominant culture – and so the pervasiveness of the influence of dominant cultural norms must be acknowledged. That these spaces are made up of multiple individuals with varied experiences means attempts by some to create alternatives may be disrupted or refused by others, whether via conscious means of sanctions and stigmatisation, or through the unconscious reinforcement of the desirability of existing norms. As Lagalisse’s (2010) study of anarchist activist collectives explored, while men criticise women who wear make-up or dress in a conventionally feminine way for buying into a consumer capitalist culture, these are also the women they are more likely to flirt with and pay attention to. While an anti-capitalist culture supports women in their rejection of the trappings of conventional femininity, my interviewee Jodie demonstrates that it is not always a simple case of casting off concerns about appearance:

Even in a culture, a movement, that’s supposed to be dedicated to eradicating all forms of domination, obviously you care what you look like because you want people to be attracted to you: we’re all social beings who want to have social relationships.

It is worth stating here that this is not an issue restricted to heterosexual women, as both Lena and Jodie, and a significant proportion of my interviewees (seven out of 20),
identified as queer\(^9\). For many anarchist activists, a queer sexual identity is inherently political as it signifies a radical refusal to be co-opted by assimilationist LGBT politics that reinforce a binary system of gender (Portwood-Stacer 2010; Ritchie 2008). The significance of non-normative sexual identities in the political identities of these young women is not dissimilar to radical feminists’ practice of political lesbianism as a means by which to resist the tyranny of male dominance that is maintained through compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980). For Cheryl Clarke (1981), “for a woman to be a lesbian in a male-supremacist, capitalist, misogynist, racist, homophobic, imperialist culture [...] is an act of resistance” (1981:128). Similarly for many who identify with anarchism’s critique of power and domination, queer sexuality represents a resistance to a hierarchical system of heteronormative sexuality in which sexual freedom and autonomy are restricted and violated (Portwood-Stacer 2010:480). To identify against heterosexuality is to redo gender in a way that breaks with the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990). Lena and Jodie may present physically as feminine, and indeed be read as such by others (to varying negative ends), but their queer sexual identity problematises restrictive binary frameworks of sex-gender-sexuality.

**Negating gender**

The experiences of women who do represent a conventional form of physical femininity would suggest that a rejection of feminine dress may align women more closely to the abstract ideal of the (male) activist whose competency is taken for granted. Ella, for example, reflected that

> if you can be a tougher, tomboyish kind of woman then people will feel more comfortable with you doing some sort of hardcore direct action where as if you come across as quite feminine they’ll be more like ‘oh well I don’t know if you can do that’.

The valorisation of ‘macho’ activism of the type identified in Chapter 6, and the associated celebration of a form of hegemonic masculinity is evident in Ella’s statement. Such attitudes go some way to explain the satisfaction that some interviewees took in distancing themselves from femininity. Simone described how

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\(^9\) As Table 1 in Chapter four details, when asked to describe their sexuality in their own terms four participants identified as ‘straight’ and two as ‘heterosexual’. Five participants identified as ‘queer’, one as ‘lesbian/queer’ and one as ‘straight/queer’. One participant identified as ‘gay’, one as ‘bisexual’, one as ‘bi-curious’, one as heterosexual/bisexual’. Three were undecided or unwilling to label themselves.
“[sometimes] you want to go on a riot and it feels really fucking good to not feel too feminine about it,” while Chrissy reflected on the anonymity afforded by black blocs:

You’ll notice if you look in black blocs people usually wear baggy clothes so you can’t tell what body’s underneath and it’s all black and you hair’s covered and all of these things and I quite like that, I like being able to not be perceived as a woman, I think that’s a really liberating thing sometimes.

Several of the women interviewed reflected on the attention that they pay to managing their presentation so as to nullify or minimise their female gendered identity. Although Naomi considers herself to be quite feminine, she explained how she would “pick it up and put it down as and when I please for different purposes.” In the context of direct action she makes a conscious effort to minimise the physical aspects of her femininity so as to make her gender secondary to her activist identity:

When I go on an action it’s really important, to me, that I am not dressing to draw attention to myself, unless I’m in fancy dress, not dressing to draw attention to myself and dressing very practically and that I actually want to fit in with the guys. I want you to look at me and think ‘there’s a strong person’ and just blend in with wearing jeans and boots and that’s a really premeditated thought out thing for me.

Naomi’s quote illustrates the extent to which women’s bodies are always already conspicuous as the somatic other, a body out of place in spaces of physical activism where the masculine body is the norm (Puwar 2004a). Naomi was by no means the only interviewee who engaged in an active process of appearance management. The minimisation of gender used in attempts to ‘pass’ in these spaces is most visible in the adoption of androgynous dress but this does not guarantee success. A participant in the book fair discussion mentioned previously reflected on how her attempts to disguise her gender by wearing loose-fitting, masculine clothing did not prevent her from being read as feminine by others (predominantly men) and having her other behaviours assessed in relation to this female status. The primacy of her sex category of woman was such that she remained accountable to and was assessed in relation to gendered expectations of what was appropriate for her sex category (West and Zimmerman 1987). In a continuation of her earlier comments regarding the double
bind of women Lena identifies the heart of the issue: “not being feminine is also problematic, just being a woman is problematic”.

**Redoing gender through activism: Physicality and space**

As the foregoing discussion has indicated, activist women’s attempts to redo gender through their engagement with practices of dress represent a complex and conflicted negotiation of femininity and gender. As women, the emphasis on the physical is often restricted to appearance and as such it is appropriate to examine this in detail. However, as the rest of this chapter will explore, the physical activity associated with much of the most visible social movement activism provides female activists with opportunities to redo gender to produce a version of femininity and womanhood that is linked to physicality. In doing so I consider how they are able to dismantle automatic associations of femininity with passivity and inaction.

As Chapter 2 established, neoliberal postfeminist regimes emphasise the opening up of the public sphere to women, celebrating young women’s achievements in the fields of work and education and rejoicing in their entrance to what were previously largely inaccessible areas of public life such as finance, parliamentary politics and STEM fields. And yet while women have been becoming increasingly visible in public life this visibility has been matched by an increased surveillance and an intensification of bodily management regimes (Bordo 2003:166). It is, Bordo argues, “through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenising, elusive ideal of femininity” that “female bodies become docile bodies” (2003:166). The docility of female bodies may be seen as historically ubiquitous, but such docility is and always has been heavily raced and classed. The physical passivity of the 1950’s housewife that pervades cultural consciousness is the result of relative privilege that ensured that the grinding drudgery of housework could be performed with the help of electronic goods, or outsourced to domestic staff.

Nonetheless, as Iris Marion Young explored in her seminal essay, *Throwing Like a Girl*, “there is a particular style of bodily comportment that is typical of feminine existence” (Young 2005:31) and this bodily comportment results not from physiology or anatomical difference but from the structures and conditions that shape many women’s experiences of being in the world. Furthermore, women’s embodied experience of the world has been argued to be the “basis of the production of
gendered subjectivities” (Theberge 2003:498). This has been highlighted by West and Zimmerman in their theorisation of ‘doing gender’, emphasising the difference between male and female children’s engagement with the physical world: “Little boys appropriate the gender ideal of ‘efficaciousness’, that is, being able to affect the physical and social environment through the exercise of physical strength or appropriate skills. In contrast, little girls learn to value ‘appearance’, that is, managing themselves as ornamental objects” (1987:41). Women’s physicality is therefore valued in appearance over action, as object rather than subject, desired but not desiring. Inherent in this conceptualisation are the passivity and docility to which Bordo (2003) refers but which are problematic for women such as those interviewed here because of the agency and action so central to activist political engagement.

As Young (2005) identifies, the space “that is physically available to the feminine body is frequently of greater radius than the space that she uses and inhabits” (2005:40), a phenomenon visible whenever a woman crosses her legs on an empty bus, or walks with her arms held firmly by her side instead of swinging freely. Such corporeal restraint frequently represents restrictions in women’s sense of their own entitlement and efficacy: “The timidity, immobility and uncertainty that frequently characterise feminine movement project a limited space for the feminine ‘I can’” (Young 2005:40). Yet at the heart of many forms of activism is the requirement that activists occupy and engage with public space, actions that necessitate a confidence, mobility and certainty in one’s actions. Women’s participation in such activities can therefore be argued to increase the space for the feminine “I can” and in doing so can alter women’s subjectivity. The situational context of social movement activism facilitates a reframing of gender in which the achievement of collective goals necessitates that women’s gender performances embrace a physicality not associated with normative femininity.

Theberge (2003) argues for the potential for female empowerment through sports because they teach women to experience and engage with the world physically through their bodies; bodies that are strong, capable, trained, and permitted to occupy space. Such activities create powerful bodies, “a form of embodiment that is decidedly at odds with the uncertainty and hesitancy of traditional forms of feminine existence” (Theberge 2003:505). Similarly, social movements present women with spaces in
which they are encouraged and required to occupy space and to be physically conspicuous. In her interview for my study, Catherine talked about the environment of physical action that characterised an anti-roads camp she stayed at, saying that, “there were people who were doing occupation stuff of both genders, all genders” and describing how protecting the ancient woodland that was at risk required activists to present their bodies as physical barriers by climbing trees, digging tunnels and locking-on to machinery. Meanwhile, Debi’s role as a hunt saboteur required running across open countryside to distract and confront those involved in fox hunting and badger culling. Black blocs require activists to put their bodies on the front line as an anonymised, and as such degendered mass, where the presence of the body momentarily outweighs its gendered nature, while legal observers (highly visible in fluorescent orange tabards at protests of every type) are valued by other activists for their role in holding police officers to account for their actions.

The significance of women’s bodies in political protest has been explored in examinations of the Suffragettes (Parkin 2000), Greenham Common and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Schirmer 1994) and the Israeli Occupation (Sasson-Levy and Rapoport 2003), amongst others, demonstrating how such acts can refigure notions of both femininity and the political. Similar challenges to presumptions of the passivity of women’s bodies are made by public spectacles such as Greenpeace’s Ice Climb of the Shard in 2013 (Greenpeace 2013), or the occupation of a 90 metre tall chimney at EDF’s West Burton power station in 2012 (No Dash for Gas 2012).

Bodies together
My time at an environmental direct action camp instilled in me an understanding of the necessity of taking and occupying space, and relatedly the importance of working together to make something happen. The direct action camp had created a space that I was entitled to occupy but its existence and success depended on my contribution to it. My presence in that space was not only symbolic – one of many expressing their objection to the destruction of the environment – but also constitutive of it. The camp was based in a farmer’s field and the reflections I wrote when I returned home give an indication of the atmosphere:
Despite being in the middle of a field, surrounded by large marquees and individual tents, and in the company of energetic and enthusiastic people, it was clear that I was not at a festival. For a start the toilets were too pleasant. We were told in no uncertain terms that “This is not a festival. This is not something that is put on for you. It only works if everyone pitches in and contributes.” And this was reinforced on a daily basis when morning ‘village’ meetings identified tasks for the day and requested volunteers. There was never a shortage, even when it came to our village’s turn to clean out the compost toilets. At one point it was explained that washing up took place in shifts rather than everyone doing their own because this was more hygienic. Someone nearby chimed in with, “Anyone who was at Stirling will remember the dysentery. It was shit.” The pun seemed entirely accidental.

...On the first night a lot of the infrastructure was still being set up. One of the kitchens was up and running, and the compost toilets and tents had been erected, but the food needed bringing in and we needed to lay the walk boards so that the site was accessible for wheelchairs and pushchairs, and so that hundreds of pairs of feet didn’t turn the site into something akin to Glastonbury ’97 should it rain. I volunteered to help with both and so spent the evening passing jumbo packs of toilet roll and boxes of food (who knew anyone could ever need quite so much soya milk or peanut butter!?) along a chain before lugging large chipboard panels around to form the walkway. It felt good though, being physical in a way that sitting in an office all week doesn’t really lend itself to. Plus I figured it’d be easier to sleep on a hard, uneven floor if I was exhausted.

...On Sunday I volunteered for gate duty, which involved sitting in a van at the top of the hill for a few hours and making sure that the police didn’t try to enter the site. Although it wasn’t the main gate and so wasn’t the main focus of the police’s attention, it did feel slightly daunting to be on the front line should they decide to storm the site. They didn’t of course, but sitting in the van listening to the radio chatter from the comms team made me feel like I was doing something useful and important. I felt involved, part of something, contributing.

(Researcher’s notes, August 2013)

The emphasis on collectivity and community in my notes has links to the horizontal forms of organising that Chapter 6 asserted are created as prefigurative invocations of
self-sustaining communities in anarchistic social movements. As such, these spaces not only provide justifications for occupying space but also create opportunities for women to train their bodies to be able to do so powerfully through workshops and skill shares. As the discussion of skill shares in the previous chapter demonstrated, these activist communities are underpinned by philosophies of mutual aid and solidarity that promote collective empowerment through horizontal training and education practices. For those who are new to grassroots politics or who lack confidence in their abilities, opportunities to encounter and learn direct action tactics and other activist practices can have a positive impact on self-efficacy.

For women, training in the physical and practical aspects of activism can be particularly significant for their sense of self-efficacy as activists because the type of public ‘stunts’ that are commonly venerated as ‘proper activism’ (discussed in Chapter 6) are the types of activity for which women are less likely to possess the requisite skills. As West and Zimmerman (1987:41) state, men learn from an early age to aspire to efficacy in their pursuit of the masculine ideal while women are encouraged to value their physical beauty, such that as Judy Wajcman, in her feminist analysis of technology, has argued “technical competence is an integral part of masculine gender identity” (1991:22). The oppositional construction of gender difference necessitates the rejection of masculine values in the pursuit of feminine identity, so women largely do not learn to orient themselves to the technical, technological or manual aspects of the physical world. This is compounded by the patriarchal structure of most social institutions that mean girls are not exposed to or encouraged to adopt manual skills through the family, education or, as women, the workplace. Pervasive notions of appropriate feminine behaviour still contribute to the hidden curriculum of secondary schools where woodwork, metalwork and electronics are constructed as male and do not attract female students (Smyth and Darmondy 2007), while women remain vastly underrepresented in skilled manual labour (Brinkley et al 2013). As Wajcman (1991:21) contends, “technical knowledge involves tacit, intuitive knowledge and ‘learning by doing’” which too often remain the preserve of men, resulting in “the construction of men as strong, manually able and technologically endowed, and women as physically and technically incompetent” (Cockburn 1983:203).
Consequently skill shares and direct action training enable women to encounter and master physical and manual skills that represent a culture of embodied ability, of active and confident physicality, that does not align with emphasised femininity’s celebration of passivity and helplessness. Activist women are instead encouraged to embrace the ability of their bodies to act and achieve, to have an impact on the world through an unequivocal presence within it. As Taft (2011:83) has stated in relation to activist girlhood, “their activist identities thus offer them a way of being in the world that is different from that suggested by conventional gender roles and the pressures of emphasised femininity.” By participating in such activism women are presenting often feminine bodies as defiant and disobedient in direct challenge to the expectations of mainstream gender culture where “‘proper’ femininity requires compliance and acceptance of a passive gender role” (Currie et al 2006:419). The role of accountability in the process of doing and redoing gender is such that the observed primacy of sex category can contribute to a reframing of femininity regardless of whether or not female activists present as conventionally feminine. The very act of doing politics as women can force a reconsideration of the normative conceptions of gender.

**Bodies beyond activism**

Just as Hollander (2013) observed that female students who took self-defence classes applied their new-found feminist consciousness to their everyday experiences, so women’s efficacy and confidence in their occupation of physical space extends beyond the situational context of social movement activism. Pohl et al’s (2000) research into women’s use of outdoor space and wilderness identified how the self-sufficiency and groundedness they experienced were transferable outcomes that carried over into their everyday lives. Similarly it is notable that many of the women that I interviewed for this study spoke not only of their use of public space in their activism but also in their everyday lives, by way of activities including hiking, mountain-climbing, and cycling. As Wesely and Gaardner (2004) have emphasised in their work on women’s negotiations of fear in the urban outdoors, women learn not to feel at home in the outdoors or public spaces and have instead been taught that “the private, domestic realm is their domain” (2004:647). However, a familiarity and confidence with such spaces can have hugely positive impacts not only on physical and mental health (Abraham et al 2010; van den Berg et al 2010) but can also translate into changes in
their gendered life experiences (Wesely and Gaardner 2004) – a phenomenon that Simone de Beauvoir (1952:333) identified in the Second Sex: “Let her swim, climb mountain peaks, pilot an airplane, battle against the elements, take risks, go out for adventure, and she will not feel before the world the timidity which I have referred to.”

The centrality of environmental discourse to the social movements that interviewees participated in means that an observable culture of cycling is not wholly surprising. Many of the women I interviewed cycled extensively, both for leisure and transport, and for some cycling contributed considerably to their identities. Catherine, for example, earned her living as a cycle-trainer, running classes and workshops to encourage and promote participation in cycling. For others bicycles were their main form of transport, affording a greater freedom to travel than public transport or walking would allow. So enamoured with cycling was Sam that she sported a bike-inspired tattoo. In explaining that “I cycle, and more men do that than women and it involves taking up space on the road,” Lena identified the political and gendered nature of cycling, drawing attention to the difference in numbers of men and women who cycle while suggesting a possible reason why women may feel less confident cycling. For Lena, cycling represented just another way in which she refused to conform to a passive, emphasised femininity, linking it to her general enjoyment of confrontational physical activity:

I’m physically quite confrontational, so I go to a lot of punk gigs and make a point of jumping up and down and getting hit in the face and I really enjoy fighting, you know physically, wrestling and things like that.

Lena’s statement provides a stark contrast to many women’s fear and avoidance of violence and instead indicates a confidence in her corporeal capacity. This confidence in one’s body to be able to take on the world is at odds with pervasive cultural notions of women’s frailty and vulnerability relative to their male counterparts. The fear that women are expected to experience about the outdoors was reflected on by both Catherine and Anushka. As referenced in Chapter 5, Catherine spoke of a women from

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10 Garrard et al’s (2008) observational census study of cyclists in Australia found that male cyclists outnumbered female cyclists 79.4% to 20.6%.
her childhood whose solo travelling contradicted her learned beliefs in women’s vulnerability: “women are brought up to think that they can’t travel on their own for two months, bad things will happen.” As such Catherine has herself travelled alone for extended periods by bicycle. When I spoke with Anushka she was recovering from burnout – an overload and over-commitment to activism that had taken its toll on her mental and emotional well-being, and a feature of activist cultures that will be analysed in greater depth in Chapter 9. However in light of her experiences of burnout, she had recently been redirecting her energies into hiking and mountain climbing, taking solace from the wilderness environments into which she could escape. She described how she usually hiked with a mixed-sex group of friends but on a recent occasion her male partner declined to join them, leaving herself and two female friends to walk alone. She reflected on her thought process at the time, saying “oh, are we going to be alright? Like, us three women, are we going to be alright?” but found that she gained a lot from the experience, commenting that she appreciated “the coolness of doing stuff that’s apparently quite difficult or risky or hard or whatever as women.” She now intends to train as a mountain leader, identifying a possible new role for herself that requires the physical confidence and independence that she valued in her activism: “I’m well excited about being a qualified mountain woman.”

I do not want to propose a unidirectional causal relationship between the physical activity that women engage in as part of their activism and the pleasure they take from their physical leisure and lifestyle activities. I do not believe that these women are interested in outdoor pursuits specifically because their activism has enabled them to view the world with more confidence, rather I contend that these two aspects of their lives are mutually reinforcing in that they enable women to re-examine and reconstruct their gendered sense of self. In both contexts women’s engagement with the world through their bodies occurs as a conscious embodiment of feminist agency whereby physical activity produces feelings of ableness, agency and autonomy (Parkin 2000; Wesely and Gaardner 2004).

**Conclusion**
This chapter has examined the ways in which young female activists understand, engage with and resist gender and femininity within the sphere of activism. By utilising
West and Zimmerman’s (1987) model of ‘doing gender’ I have demonstrated that gender is not possessed by individuals but is instead achieved through interaction with others. The prevailing gender regimes operating within the alternative political spaces of activism have the potential to be counterhegemonic, thereby providing respite from the onslaught of restrictive gender expectations that women contend with in mainstream society. However, as Verta Taylor has emphasised, “gender hierarchy is so persistent that, even in movements that purport to be gender-inclusive, the mobilisation, leadership patterns, strategies, ideologies and even the outcomes of social movements are gendered” (1999:9). As such this chapter has highlighted some of the ways in which young female activists navigate a complex terrain of femininity and womanhood in which youth and beauty can work both for and against you.

I began by examining the way in which femininity is performed by the young women I interviewed through dress and appearance, acknowledging the theoretical debt owed to subcultural studies of collective identity formation through style. The chapter considered the role that anti-capitalist critiques of consumption play in informing how female activists dress by emphasising the role of critical consciousness in the embodiment of political ideals. Furthermore, practicality was identified as a key motivator in the clothing choices interviewees made. The need to appropriately dressed for physical activities in the outdoors ensured that the contextual relevance of clothing overrode cultural norms related to women’s appearance. Fences, for example, cannot be scaled as easily in high heels, and these considerations figured in interviewees’ narratives as well as my own experiences. These alternative norms of dress manifested in an observable if informal dress code at certain events and in certain spaces. Anarchist events, I found, had a particular overriding aesthetic that was counterhegemonic yet nonetheless gendered. Interviewees expressed complicated relationships with femininity and their expression of gender through dress. As wilful women, many engaged in a conscious and politically-informed resignification of gender that was rooted in collectivist feminist understandings of gender inequality and oppression. Discussing the value of alternative spaces for young women who are in the process of shaping their adult identities, Taft (2011:80) notes how activism “can therefore enable teenage girls to find the space to critically reflect on and refuse conventional gender rules and the constraints of ‘typical’ girlhood”. Thus, a tendency
towards a playful relationship with the trappings of femininity does not represent a postfeminist neoliberal choice agenda, but rather a conscious intentionality that positions these wilful young women against dominant theorisations of gender in late modernity.

In contrast to the way in which young women are all too often invisible in contemporary political discourse, their experiences of social movement spaces illuminated a contrasting hyper visibility resulting from their conspicuous difference. As the somatic other in male political spaces, women’s ‘bodies out of place’ (Puwar 2004a) must be carefully managed to tread a fine line between femininity and masculinity if women are to be perceived as credible activists. Florals, bright colours, dresses and the colour pink all risk increasing women’s visibility and in doing so expose them to unwelcome speculation and critique. For some women this was best dealt with by embracing androgynous or masculine dress, and indeed was welcomed by some as liberating. However such strategies of negating gender were not always successful within women’s sex role categorisations overriding their attempts to undo and redo gender.

The chapter then turned to examine the ways in which social movement activism presents women with opportunities to reframe femininity in such a way that it becomes associated with an active, physical female embodiment. Acknowledging the normative understanding of feminine bodies as docile bodies, I have argued that women’s participation in activism challenges idealised understandings of young women’s bodies as objects of admiration but little more. By actively inserting their bodies into the world through direct action, young women demand that their corporeality be recognised as a manifestation of political agency and autonomy. Whether through hunt sabbing, anti-roads blockades or black blocs, interviewees’ bodies became their tools of disruption and dissent and in doing so challenged the idea that femininity must be compliant, submissive or obedient. Furthermore, the collective context in which activism takes place was shown to provide opportunities for women to learn the skills that facilitate their occupation of space through these methods.

This chapter has demonstrated that the relationship between femininity and activism is not unidirectional. It is not simply the case that the identification with a certain form
of femininity influences the activism that women engage in because it best serves their political purposes. Instead the existence of counter-hegemonies within alternative political cultures equally informs individuals’ own interpretation of and relationship with femininity by allowing them to resist and reshape their gendered performances. Just as alternative perspectives on the value of hyper-feminine physical appearance are proposed by anarchist philosophy, so young women’s participation in activism more generally challenges notions of women’s political and bodily passivity. Discussing the girl activists she studied in the Americas, Taft (2011:83) contends that, “their activist identities thus offer them a way of being in the world that is different from that suggested by conventional gender roles and the pressures of emphasised femininity.” The next chapter will demonstrate how the centrality of feminism to these activist identities reinforces this potential for resistance.
Chapter 8
Feminism, Identity, and Agency in Women’s Social Movement Activism

Introduction
At this point it should be apparent that the activist women I have interviewed and encountered during this study are not simply passively experiencing sexism and oppression (whether from inside and outside of political organisations) but are instead engaged in active resistance to it through a variety of means. As the previous chapter considered in relation to performances of femininity, the young women in this study are engaged in a complex negotiation of gendered norms and have developed reflexive strategies of resistance that challenge narrow normative definitions of femininity, womanhood and the political, and characterise them as wilful women. As Chapter 6 outlined, female activists are making explicit choices about the forms of organisation they feel comfortable participating in and are critically engaged in discourses of privilege and oppression within them. This critical, reflexive political engagement is rooted, I argue, in a feminist identification that facilitates an individual and collective feminist agency. In advancing their theory of a transnational feminist democracy, Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty conceptualise feminist agency as “the conscious and ongoing reproduction of the terms of one’s existence while taking responsibility for this process. And agency is anchored in the practice of thinking of oneself as a part of feminist collectivities and organisations” (Alexander and Mohanty 1997:xxviii). For Alexander and Mohanty (1997), there is a critical difference between identifying as a woman and identifying as a feminist because “the former refers to a social designation, the latter to a critical awareness of the implications of this designation” (1997:xxvii). As such, identification as feminist for many interviewees is associated with the gender consciousness that they were identified to have developed through progressive gender socialisation in Chapter 5. Others have come to feminism through education and social movement practice, but regardless of their routes to feminism, it now provides them with a constitutive community of radical political theory and action that informs not only their practice within anarchist and
environmental groups but their critical reflexive engagement with the world more widely.

An exploration of the role of feminism in the activist subjectivities of the women in this study is critical to the larger thesis of these young female activists as engaged in an active reformulation of gender and the political so as to advance the status of women on individual and collective levels. Specifically, it is important to differentiate between activism engaged in by women, and activism that is an embodiment of feminist agency. In her study of women’s activism and feminist agency in Mozambique and Nicaragua, Disney (2008) emphasised the importance of such a distinction in effectively theorising women’s participation in political struggles: while women’s political participation and activism is necessarily agentic, it is not necessarily feminist in its aims. Indeed, in the case of anti-feminist or White supremacist movements it can be explicitly opposed to the liberatory and emancipatory aims of feminism (e.g. Blee 1996; Ferber 1999; Steuter 1992).

As such, in this chapter I demonstrate the ways in which the activist women I have interviewed draw on feminist identities and collective feminist histories in order to resist forms of sexism and misogyny that pervade some movement spaces. These forms of resistance range from using feminist theory to identify and ‘call-out’ unacceptable behaviour, through creating and promoting anti-oppressive movement practice, to creating women-only spaces to provide alternatives to male-dominated movement cultures. In doing so activist women produce and reproduce a form of feminist agency that facilitates a theorisation of young women’s active, dynamic and wilful engagement with the political. The chapter begins by considering interviewees’ identification as feminist in the context of contemporary debates around anti-feminism, post-feminism and third-wave feminism. It then goes on to consider the contradictions between feminist theory and practice in anarchism and environmentalism, characterised as ‘non-feminist social movements’. The inconsistencies between the feminist analysis integrated into sections of anarchist and environmentalist theory and interviewees’ experiences of sexism and misogyny in political practice are highlighted with reference to emergent feminist discursive strategies of identification and confrontation. In light of these contradictions, the
chapter then explores the ways in which the young female activists in question are working to realign theory and practice through the use of anti-oppressive practice and the creation of alternative feminist spaces. In doing so this chapter demonstrates the ways in which interviewees are engaged in a feminist praxis whereby feminist identification informs their activist practice with the aim of collective, rather than individual, liberation. In doing so they are aligned with Alexander and Mohanty’s perspective on social action that, “social transformation cannot remain at the level of ideas, it must engage in praxis” (Alexander and Mohanty 1997:xxviii).

**Feminist identities**

Contrary to the dominance of postfeminist ideologies, the women I interviewed were overwhelmingly positive about feminism as a pluralistic political project, with all claiming a feminist identity. Jodie, for example, was direct when I asked for her thoughts and feelings about feminism: “I identify as feminist and I’m always proud of that and explicit with that.” However, in speaking about feminism my interviewees also identified some of the key problems that feminism as a discourse, and feminists as individuals, face.

**Fears of feminism**

Su identified the hostility that many feminist face when claiming a feminist identity or professing feminist beliefs. While feminists have long experienced opposition and abuse for critiquing sexism and the structures of patriarchal culture, the rise of social media and the prominence of feminist commentators on social networking platforms such as Twitter in recent years have highlighted the problems feminist women face when speaking publicly. The centrality of technology and the internet specifically to current feminist activism and discourse has led some to identify the emergence of a fourth wave of feminism (Munro 2013; Cochrane 2013; Baumgardner 2011). While the validity of the wave metaphor is itself inherently contested, and there is an argument to be made for current manifestations of feminism in the UK representing a third rather than a fourth wave, the extensive use of internet and social media technologies by young women is such that feminists have begun to highlight a pervasive culture of online misogyny. The harassment experienced by prominent internet feminists is indicative of the wider abuse of women in online spaces. While online abuse is
received by both men and women, the threats of murder and sexual violence aimed at women online are all too believably real when women have to deal with sexual harassment, domestic violence and rape in their daily offline lives. Reflecting on her own experience of blogging as a woman, Ann Little explicates the situation that women find themselves faced with online: “women who write in cyberspace are exposed in ways that people who present online as men are not [...] we still have to play by the same “girl rules” that we’re subjected to in the meat [offline] world [...] don’t take up too much space (physically or rhetorically), don’t say anything not-nice, and don’t make the mistake of thinking you’re an authority on anything” (Little 2010:220). As Megarry’s (2014) research into women’s experiences of abuse harassment on Twitter has detailed, the abuse directed at women constitutes an online form of sexual harassment designed to silence women and exclude them from the digital public sphere.

Several interviewees directly referenced the abuse that women have been subjected to on Twitter, particularly the death and rape threats that Caroline Criado-Perez received when she launched a campaign to ensure that a woman other than the Queen was featured on a British banknote (Doward 2013). For my interviewee Su, the issue of online abuse was particularly significant in light of her work as a digital environmental campaigner. She explained that while she wholeheartedly embraces feminism, she doesn’t always publicly label herself as such:

> Women who declare themselves as feminists seem to be vilified and I just don’t understand that and so in certain circles I’m wary of saying I’m a feminist because of the stigma that comes with it but when you say that ‘I’m strongly for equality between men and women’ people are like ‘oh yeah yeah’ and so that’s an interesting thing for me.

Catherine’s relationship with feminism was more complicated, describing how she found feminism “very confusing” and related this to the differences between her environmental campaigning and feminist campaigning:

> Almost all of my life the stuff that I’ve campaigned on doesn’t affect me directly and I think to some extent that’s a self-preservation method, whereas feminism stuff affects me directly.
Although Catherine is used to experiencing confrontational situations in her environmental activism, there is a significant personal aspect to feminist campaigning that is not present when campaigning on climate change and fossil fuels. Feminist campaigning emphasised the areas of her life that she is not fully in control of and which make her vulnerable. As someone who is very aware of her privilege as a White, middle-class, educated woman throughout the interview she was unequivocal that she does not consider herself oppressed or discriminated against in most aspects of her life:

I’m really aware of my privilege, and the only way I’m not privileged in society is because I’m female, that’s the only negative that I have on a privilege points basis.

However, in discussing feminism, that area in which she experiences lack – lack of privilege, lack of status, lack of ease in interactions – was evidently one way in which she could be made to feel uncomfortable and vulnerable. When I interviewed her she had recently been to some feminist events which she described as unusual for her, something she didn’t usually do. Her concern about how she would be treated by members of the public is suggestive of why this might be:

Going to the anti-strip-club demo was more challenging for me than a lot of other things, although we stood with banners outside the town hall, it wasn’t exactly difficult, there were loads of press there but I was really expecting cat calls and ‘plain Janes are just jealous’ that sort of thing. I’m not. I have absolutely no desire to be treated like a sexual object in that way but I just thought that that would be more difficult for me to do, with the kind of shouting out that you get than for doing stuff around stuff that doesn't affect you directly.

Catherine’s statement illustrates how environmental activism does not attract the same level of personal critique that feminist activists experience. The deeply personal nature of feminist activism as a form of embodied politics is such that a denial of feminist views by others can be experienced as a refusal to acknowledge the validity of the self. The silencing of women’s voices and the denial of their experiences is a common occurrence and serves to negate the political power that female activists are attempting to claim.
Naming and claiming feminism

Some of the interviewees’ narratives of coming to or ‘finding’ feminism related particularly to the moment at which they embraced the ‘feminist’ label. The pervasiveness of postfeminist discourse is such that for many women feminism remains an outmoded idea claimed only by hairy-legged, man-hating lesbians. The “I’m not a feminist, but...” phenomenon (Griffin 1989) illustrates the extent to which young women in particular identify and are dissatisfied with gendered inequalities yet do not feel comfortable claiming an identity that would position them against emphasised femininity. Particularly for young heterosexual women, the desire to remain attractive to men necessitates a refused identification – a disidentification (Henry 2004:7) – from a political ideology that challenges men’s unspoken dominance. Michelle referred to her own initial ambivalence towards the ‘feminist’ label:

So I think I’ve always been a feminist but how long have I used the feminist word? Hmm, three or four years? I had a flatmate who was really feminist and she used to be like ‘you are a feminist, you just don’t say the word.’

However, as she describes, Michelle’s reluctance was related more to her perception of the limited scope of feminism in the UK:

More than disliking the term I dislike the history of the movement; that White, Southern, middle-class movement. It’s important to get rid of Page 3 and it’s important to collate issues of sexism and get women on bank notes, which are the three figurehead things but at the end of the day feminism to me is about the people in refuges or getting beaten up or whatever and if we can’t put them at the front then what type of feminism is this? And that to me is obviously a feminist movement that wants to talk about race and disability and class. So there are lots of Black feminists writing really good stuff but to me it’s even wider than that issue, it’s like even the White feminists aren’t sticking with the people who need them best.

For Ella, claiming a feminist identity was also problematised by perceptions of feminism as a middle-class, White women’s movement that didn’t speak to her experience as a Black woman:

I was always one of those people who I always believed in equality for women but the term feminism, especially within
the black community, feminism is only for white women, I kind of didn’t want to use that term.

Such concerns about the Whiteness of feminism have been widely articulated, particularly by third-wave women of colour (see, for example, Walker 1995; Hernandez and Rehman 2002) for whom the politics of gender espoused by second-wave feminists was insufficiently intersectional and as such failed to speak to their lived experiences of diversity and difference. Such debates have only intensified as social media technologies have increased the visibility of marginalised voices and perspectives and for many women (of colour, but also White allies), feminism remains problematic and exclusive. Ella, however, is now less conflicted about identifying as a feminist:

But around the time that Slut Walk was happening and this whole idea of feminism was, for me, coming more into the mainstream I felt more comfortable calling myself a feminist.

Although some women spoke of their hesitation to identify as feminists, regardless they all now did so. In her ethnographic study of working class women, Skeggs (1997) explored the ways in which her interviewees related to feminism, identifying the threat it posed to the rewards gained through the management of respectable femininities. In doing so she noted that “access to knowledge about feminism is central to understanding how the women respond to, resist and take up feminism” (1997:141). The concentration of feminist knowledge within the academy in the 1980s and 1990s meant that the working class women in Skegg’s study “did not have access to academic feminism and if they did it would not be easily accessible because of differences in educational capital” (1997:141). In contrast, the subject positions of women in my study have enabled a greater engagement with the discourses of feminism. Skeggs is emphatic that “women’s responses [to feminism] are always historically located, the product of positioning and partiality. They are interpretations made at a local level of global issues and representations” (1997:140). As such, while the relationships that Skeggs’ interviewees had with feminism were mediated through celebrity ‘feminists’ (Madonna, Margaret Thatcher, Germaine Greer), the forms of feminist representation available to my interviewees were exponentially greater as a result of both the internet and higher education. All of the women I interviewed had participated in higher education, with several holding or studying for Master’s or
doctoral degrees. Further to this, all but one interviewee had studied arts, humanities, or social science degrees. The mainstreaming of feminism within higher education has seen women’s studies centres and courses declining as feminist theory is integrated into discipline curricula across universities. As such, those studying English, Modern Languages, Geography, History and International Relations would almost inevitably have encountered feminist critiques.

‘Good-enough feminists’
Some of the women I interviewed qualified their feminist identity by confessing their limited ‘academic credentials’. Simone commented that “I’m not a well-read feminist,” while Imogen stated “I see myself as a feminist, even though I don’t know much about the theory or anything.” The perception that in order to be a proper feminist one must have an encyclopaedic knowledge of feminist theory is interesting not least because it is at odds with the emphatic insistence by many attempting to popularise feminism that a belief in equal rights between men and women is sufficient. Author and columnist, Caitlin Moran, defines feminism as “Simply the belief that women should be as free as men,” (2012:88) and suggests that there is a “quick way of working out if you’re a feminist. Put your hand in your pants. a) Do you have a vagina? And b) Do you want to be in charge of it? If you said ‘yes' to both, then congratulations! You're a feminist” (2012:79-80). Actor Emma Watson was widely lauded for her address to the UN as UN Women goodwill ambassador in which she called on men to play a role in the feminist movement, stating that "For the record, feminism by definition is: ‘The belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities. It is the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes'" (Watson 2014). In a later interview in Elle magazine, she emphasised the ‘open church’ that feminism represents: “Feminism is not here to dictate to you. It’s not prescriptive, it’s not dogmatic. All we are here to do is give you a choice” (quoted in Candy 2014:202).

However, some of the responses of my interviewees pointed towards a more complicated relationship with feminism than such straightforward statements imply. In my previous research (Holyoak 2008) I have theorised that intergenerational feminist tensions have resulted in an aspirational category of the ‘good-enough feminist’, whereby young women’s feminism is judged against an imagined golden age of feminist activism in the 1970s. Young women’s ‘third-wave’ feminist activism has been
criticised by older feminists as apolitical and individualistic, while its focus has been argued to be overly cultural at the expense of structural concerns (Aune and Holyoak, forthcoming). Rebecca Walker, whose 1992 Ms Magazine article, ‘Becoming the Third Wave’, is widely considered to have heralded the beginning of the American Third Wave feminist movement, writes of how she envisioned a ‘feminist ghetto’ where “every decision I made, person I spent time with, word I uttered, had to measure up to an image I had in my mind of what was morally and politically right according to my vision of female empowerment” (1995:xxix). Her “desire to be a good feminist” stemmed from a need for love and recognition from an intergenerational feminist community that she feared would reject her if she deviated from the status quo (1995:xxx). As such, the ‘good-enough feminist’ is one who experiences Walker’s struggles in “constantly measuring up to some cohesive fully down-with-the-feminist-cause identity without contradictions and messiness” (1995:xxxi).

As Walker has noted (1995:xxxii), the feminist ideal and its associated qualifiers are different for each young woman, but Naomi’s concern that she is not knowledgeable or active enough as a feminist indicates one such way in which the spectre of the ‘good-enough feminist’ haunts the young women I interviewed:

I’m not happy with myself that I haven’t taken more time researching and being active on feminism and I often think I might appreciate getting involved in a women’s group and a feminist group in particular.

Although Naomi identifies as a feminist, she remains concerned that she is neither active nor knowledgeable enough to qualify as a ‘good-enough’ feminist. Similarly, Ruth qualifies her identification as a feminist with the statement, “I would say I’m not actively fighting for women’s rights.” Such a statement implies a distinction between, and possible a hierarchy within, different forms of feminist activism.

Regardless of interviewees’ own perceptions of their feminist credentials, and while there were variations in the extent to which they integrated feminist theory into their narrations, all displayed a degree of feminist literacy that enabled them to conceive of their subjectivities in gendered ways and to theorise the inequalities that they and others experience through a feminist lens.
Finding feminism in non-feminist social movements

Although some interviewees highlighted issues with feminism, there was still overwhelming support for the importance of feminism in social movement politics. The problem lay instead with the failure of their movements to effectively incorporate an intersectional feminist analysis or gendered perspective into activist praxis. As such this section expands upon the account provided in Chapter 3 of the ways in which the political philosophies and practices of anarchism and environmentalism intersect with feminism, and identifies the areas where there is still work to be done. Just as the discussion of organisational structure and practice in Chapters 3 and 6 illustrated connections between anarchist and environmental movements, so it is the case that anarchism and environmentalism, as political philosophies and as movements, have been informed by feminist theory and activism. Although I consider anarchist and environmental philosophies separately here this does not mean to imply a hermetic separation of movement practice.

Environmentalism and feminism

The term ‘ecofeminism’ was coined (as écoféminisme in French) by Francoise d’Eaubonne (d’Eaubonne 1974, cited in Daly 1979:9) to identify the significance of women’s role in achieving an environmental revolution by linking the oppression of both women and the environment under capitalist patriarchy. In the decades since the origination of the term, definitions of ecofeminism have abounded but an argument can be made for grouping these definitions under two headings: cultural ecofeminism and social ecofeminism (Rose et al 1997:161). Cultural ecofeminism emphasises women’s connection to nature through their reproductive capacity and in doing so celebrates the spiritual relationship that women have with the divine feminine represented through nature. Social ecofeminism, however, rejects the essentialism inherent to cultural ecofeminist theories of women as biologically closer to nature than men, and instead argues that nature, like gender, is a social and political concept that has been used to dominate women through dualistic Cartesian discourses that create an opposition between nature and culture, emotion and reason, and female and male. Cultural ecofeminist discourse dominates within environmental movements, with social ecofeminist approaches confined for the most part to academic discussions (Rose et al 1997:162).
What was interesting, and unexpected, in the interviews I conducted with activists was that while anarchafeminism was identified, labelled, and in some cases claimed as an identity, the same could not be said for ecofeminism. Some interviewees reflected on women’s tendency towards care and nurture – aspects central to both cultural and social ecofeminism – but these were most commonly related to women’s care work within movements (the focus of the next chapter) rather than in relation to ecology. Two more direct references were made to ecofeminist thought: Ruth spoke about her admiration for Vandana Shiva’s work around women’s role in environmental conservation and the importance of women’s knowledge for sustainable development, while when I asked Chrissy how well she thought feminism fed into anarchist or environmental movements her response included the comment that, “with environmental politics and feminism I think there’s a tendency to go all Mother Earth about and I’m not quite sure how I feel about that.” ‘Eco-feminism’ as a phrase was used only once when Sabreen spoke about encountering ecofeminist theory when researching her undergraduate dissertation. Her interest in it as “a growing ideology” did not translate to a direct identification as an ecofeminist.

One reason for ecofeminism’s lack of currency among the young women in my study is, I would contend, the prominence of the maternal archetype in cultural ecofeminist discourse. ‘Mother Earth’, the feminine divine represented as Gaia or the Goddess, constructs women as analogous to nature, conflating human motherhood and the natural world’s capacity to produce and sustain life (Stearney 1994). While the spiritual celebration of women’s reproductive and nurturing capacity has served to address their historical devaluation, Stearney (1994) has argued that the dominance of the maternal archetype in ecofeminism is ultimately damaging to feminism itself as “it denies women’s access to other identities” (1994:146). In particular for the younger, childless women in my study, the centrality of the maternal archetype to ecofeminism is not a role with which they yet identify. For Salleh (1984:340), “women’s consciousness […] of being coterminous with Nature” results from the “monthly fertility cycle, the tiring symbiosis of pregnancy, the wrench of childbirth and the pleasure of suckling an infant.” Yet although as women they are socially constructed as always potential mothers, this is not their embodied experience: they have no bodily memory of such events to ground such a consciousness. The use of the maternal
archetype as a feminine universal excludes those who do not have children, including those who cannot have children and those who wish not to. UK national statistics document declining fertility amongst all age groups (ONS 2014:4), an increase in the mean average age of mothers at first childbirth (from 25.2 years in 1986 to 27.4 in 2006 (Jefferies 2008:22)), and a demonstrable causal link between higher education and delayed childbirth (Ní Bhrolcháin and Beaujouan 2012), with one study finding the average age of entry to motherhood to be five years later for women with higher education qualification than for those without (Rendall and Smallwood 2003). As such the maternal archetype that is so central to cultural ecofeminist narratives is an increasingly remote and extraneous proposition to the highly educated women I interviewed and encountered widely during my research.

**Anarchism and feminism**

Anarchism’s links with feminism are relatively long and well-documented, although certainly not uncontested (Jeppesen and Nazar 2012). Gemie’s (1996) historical survey of the links between anarchism and feminism documented the struggle for feminist thought to be recognised and integrated into anarchism in the face of the ‘anarcho-sexism’ throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. In this sense, anarchism’s interactions with feminism are representative of the history of the Left more generally: male writers dominated intellectual debates, and political organising incorporated feminist concerns only when it was strategically useful (Gemie 1996). Nonetheless, a number of female anarchist writers such as Emma Goldman, Frederica Montseny and Lucy Parsons achieved national and international recognition during their lifetimes and their work continues to inform anarchist philosophy. Furthermore, anarchist women’s political activism has been recognised, most notably that of the Mujeres Libres (Free Women), whose political organising during the Spanish civil war and critique of sexism within revolutionary movements continues to inform contemporary anarchafeminist theory and practice (No Pretence 2011; Klito 2011; de Heredia 2007).

Anarchafeminists have argued that anarchism and feminism are naturally aligned in their commitment to eradication of oppressive structural regimes (the State and patriarchy respectively) and in their commitment to achieving that goal through small-scale, non-hierarchical collectives. Similarities have been drawn between the
organisational styles of anarchist and feminist groups. The small-scale, leaderless consciousness raising groups that proliferated during the early years of the Women’s Liberation Movement are argued to have played a similar role to anarchist affinity groups in the Spanish civil war (Kornegger 1975; Mansbridge 1994), while federative organisational structures were common to both feminist and anarchist traditions (Mansbridge 1994). These parallels can be traced to the significance for both movements of prefiguration. For anarchists, prefiguration is based in a critique of power and domination and a belief in the need to produce working alternatives to these structures. Indeed, the importance of prefiguration, and its role in determining organisational structure and political tactics, is one of the primary ways in which anarchism is differentiated from socialism in the UK (Ibrahim 2011).

Feminism, meanwhile, requires women to firstly change perceptions of themselves in order to be able to affect change. Women’s oppression is not solely an external force, but is internalised as a result of their relationships with, and love for, men (as fathers, brothers, sons, lovers). The Women’s Liberation Movement sought to enable women to change the nature of their most intimate relationships in order to be able to work for larger structural change. Consciousness-raising groups provided women with the emotionally supportive, confessional environment, based on solidarity, intimacy and personal commitment in which they were able to undertake this struggle (Mansbridge 1994:546). The mantra that ‘the personal is political’ is in essence prefigurative, emphasising the importance of women identifying oppression as a factor in their relationships and everyday experiences (Kornegger 1975:12). Feminist organising of the Second Wave also saw many women seek to create alternatives to the sexist political organising they experienced on the Left, particularly within socialist groups in the UK, and organised in small, horizontal groups that differed from the centralised committees so commonplace within socialist groups such as International Socialism and the Communist Party. In a statement that first appeared in 1971, Red Rosia and Black Maria of Black Rose Anarcho-Feminists outlined the source of women’s dissatisfaction and the need for women to organise separately from their Left groups: “Political movements, as we have known them, have separated our political activities from our personal dreams of liberation, until either we are made to abandon our dreams as impossible or we are forced to drop out of the movement because we hold
steadfastly to our dreams. As true anarchists and as true feminists, we say dare to
dream the impossible, and never settle for less than total translation of the impossible
into reality” (Black Rose Anarcho-Feminists 1971:np).

While consciousness-raising helped women to identify the oppressions that suffused
their private lives, larger structural concerns continued to occupy many feminists.
Anarchist opposition to the State as an institution of domination spoke to feminists
whose political mobilisation came through the fight for control over their own bodies
in demanding access to abortion (Kurin 1980). Kytha Kurin describes compellingly the
way in which the State’s restriction of reproductive rights brought many women to
anarchism: “When anti-woman laws were exposed not as neglected holdovers of the
Dark Ages, but as conscious means of reinforcing a woman’s body as property of the
State, many feminists were prepared to work in political movements because we had
already found ourselves in a political confrontation. There was no question of
“learning” to make politics personal; the intimacy of the personal was made political
by the intervention of the State” (Kurin 1980:np).

Tellingly, there was a greater recognition of anarchafeminism by participants than
ecofeminism. Two interviewees referred to anarchafeminist reading groups they had
attended, while others belonged to anarchafeminist groups. Lena went so far as to
recommend to me an anarchafeminist anthology that she was reading at the time.

“What about teh menz?”: Manarchy and mansplaining in
movements

Despite the strong anarchafeminist currents within anarchist and anarchistic
movements, the testimonies of interviewees and my own observations of activist
groups and gatherings make it apparent that male privilege and sexism maintain a
problematic presence within these social movement communities. As Eschle (2001)
has discussed, this results in part from the disjuncture between abstract anarchist
theory and concrete activist practice. While anarchist theory has effectively identified
the pervasive and manifold nature of power, the manifestations of power within
structures of gender, sexuality, and the like, are relegated to minor concerns in
relation to the power of the state and capitalist economy (Eschle 2001:45). The claim
that class is the primary axis of oppression, and that all other experiences of inequality
result from structural relations between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, remains a toxic issue within anarchism. As the Revolutionary Anarcha-Feminist Group Dublin have stated in their manifesto, “from an anarchist perspective, some anarchists see feminism as a divisive issue, distracting from the ‘real’ issue of class struggle [...] When anarchists constantly stress that all experience of patriarchy is linked to class, they can gloss over another truth: the experience of class is differentiated by gender” (RAG Dublin 2012:13).

Workshops on issues of gender and sexuality featured at all of the anarchist book fairs I attended, from sessions on ‘Queering Anarchy’ and sexual consent workshops, to sessions dedicated to reproductive justice and organising an anarchafeminist conference. While men outnumbered women at all of the book fairs I observed, they remained in the minority for all of the feminism or gender informed sessions I attended, with the exception of the queer anarchism talk where the gender balance was roughly 50:50. None of these sessions were advertised as women-only so the relative absence of men is suggestive of a limited interest in such issues among male attendees. In contrast, a workshop about privilege that I attended at a protest camp drew a much more mixed audience in terms of gender. Although privilege is situationally contingent and operates on a number of levels, woven through various intersections (Hulko 2009), privilege is, nonetheless, something that men are believed to possess and enact. The ideological universality of men’s experiences is such that in these spaces ‘gender’ can sometimes become synonymous with ‘women’ as it is a category relevant only to the minority or ‘other’. And yet a comment from a woman in a session on anarchafeminism effectively highlights the reality of these discussions: “I think it’s really interesting that we’re here to talk about anarchafeminism and all we’ve done so far is talk about men.” While women’s experiences and identities were the focus of much discussion during the workshops I observed, this remained frequently in relation to men, men’s behaviour, and cultures of masculinity.

During the process of participant recruitment, I circulated information about my research to a number of activist groups and in one case the recipient of the email shared the information on their group’s Facebook page. The comments that the post drew led the recipient to email me with a link as he thought I would be interested in
the discussion occurring. He was right. The following quote is a comment left on a public Facebook page, and bears reproducing in full. (The original emphasis has been retained but typos have been corrected.)

We need to evolve beyond separatist sexual gender identity-politics. These issues affect us ALL. There is no sexual inequality, there is only human inequality. If anything, maybe this should be men and women talking to each other about shared experiences. That might actually increase mutual understanding and the solidarity that is our greatest weapon. But this type of all-female approach is doing just as much damage to your collective psyche as the gender-specific magazines that aim to make you image-obsessed and concerned with meaningless celebrity break-ups at the expense of real issues.

The critique of the research focusing exclusively on women’s experiences at the exclusion of men’s voices is valid to an extent, and future research that examines gendered experiences more generally would certainly be valuable. However, the reference to ‘separatist sexual gender identity-politics’ indicates a rejection of the significance of gender as an axis of oppression. The (male) commenter went on to respond to women’s arguments for the validity of research looking at women’s experiences:

Inequality towards women affects us all whatever our gender, because it contributes to an ongoing culture of differential advantage, frustration, and in-fighting that stops progress. And for many women it fuels hatred towards men that is far easier to feel than hatred towards those in power (and indeed easier to just see those in power as driven to do what they do by simply being "men"). It’s easier because ordinary men are all around you, but those in power and who try to freeze the progress of our social values are comparatively inaccessible. Taking human issues and making them about your own gender is psychologically satisfying and makes you seem special, but it’s intellectually LAZY.

As Chapter 3 discussed, anarchafeminist organising in Spain by Mujeres Libres’ aimed to address anarchist men’s belief that women’s concerns were marginal, rather than central, to wider anarchist objectives, yet those beliefs evidently persist. Furthermore, that patriarchal oppression negatively impacts men as well as women is recognised within feminist theory, but the comment serves to shut down rather than open
debate; to silence women by negating their perspectives. It is a tactic that has become known in feminist circles, particularly among bloggers, as ‘mansplaining’: the tendency for men to explain subjects to women with no consideration that the woman in question may well know more about the subject than the man doing the explaining. Inspired by Rebecca Solnit’s (2008) essay, ‘Men Explain Things to Me’, as Rothman (2012) has observed, it is a new word for a phenomenon with a very long history. Another portmanteau word that effectively describes the character of the commenter is one that several of my interviewees used frequently: ‘manarchist’. The first recorded usage in print that I have been able to identify was by The Rock Bloc Collective in 2001, in an article printed in Onward, an anarchist newspaper published in Florida from 2000 to 2003. They define ‘Manarchy’ as: “Aggressive, competitive behaviour within the Anarchist movement that is frighteningly reminiscent of historically oppressive male gender roles. Such behaviour includes acting macho, holier than thou and elitist. Manarchy often results in exclusivity” (The Rock Bloc Collective 2001:np). Manarchy/manarchist has since been taken up as an effective descriptor within not only anarchist groups, but by social justice activists more widely, and features strongly in online discourses around privilege and political practice. As a term that has such currency online, it seems appropriate to also provide a definition drawn from the internet: “Manarchists are the non-hot variety of anarchist. Manarchists are macho "anarchists" who talk too much at meetings, adhere to the cult of the great thinkers (drop Kropotkin, Bakunin, Proudhon, Chomsky, etc... all the time), negate others' experiences, take up space, exert their privileges to their fullest, and generally perpetuate heteropatriarchal bullshit” (Otter Eliconia 2009).

While I was already familiar with the term ‘manarchist’, Chrissy introduced me to the term ‘Brocialist’, used to describe socialist men of the same type. The use of such terms by interviewees results from an engagement in feminist discourses that circulate within social movements, and in particular a participation in online feminist spaces where such issues are discussed. An example of the way in which activist women utilise online space to identify and challenge oppressive practices encountered in offline social movement spaces is provided by the ‘Manarchist Ryan Gosling’ meme. The original ‘Fuck Yeah! Ryan Gosling’ meme emerged from a Tumblr account of the same name in 2008, where pictures of the actor Ryan Gosling were captioned with
fictional quotes beginning, “Hey girl...” and continuing with affectionate or flirtatious comments that often but not always related to the situation depicted in the image (Know Your Meme 2014). “Hey girl, I can’t wait to get home and give you a foot massage” and “Hey girl, sorry my shirt fell off” are typical of the genre. The ‘Fuck Yeah! Ryan Gosling’ meme spawned multiple spin-offs, one of which, ‘Manarchist Ryan Gosling’ (manarchistryangosling.tumblr.com), took a heteronormative internet meme and repurposed it to expose the misogynistic and sexist attitudes held by a certain type of social justice activist. By applying text to a picture of Ryan Gosling, the creators were able to pithily express the hypocrisy and hostility of some self-proclaimed anarchist men to the integration of feminist critiques into movement practices and discourses. The reduction of lengthy blog posts and zine articles into a single quote exposed the absurdity of the situation that many women have found themselves in with men who profess to be progressive but who in reality engage in the very same oppressive practices that they claim to oppose. Typical examples include “Hey girl, when you said there is ‘sexual assault’ in our communities, I realised you must be an undercover cop,” “Hey girl, shut up and let me tell you how to be a good ally to women” and “Hey girl, why are you blaming me for the lack of women here? You’re the ones who aren’t showing up.”

When she was a member of the SWP, Sam found that feminist critiques of inequality and oppression were afforded little credence as they were seen to detract from the all-encompassing ideology of class: “if you ever argued against any of this class analysis in general then you were completely rubbished.” However, even after leaving and participating instead in anarchistic groups, she continued to experience similar hostility towards what would be disparagingly referred to as identity politics. Commenting on the attitudes of one activist, she described how “he posted this cartoon on Facebook where different people talking about their identity and then while they’re talking about their identity there is a banker running off with bags of money.” Such attitudes, she argued, are characteristic of a particular, very privileged, type of activist: “it’s always people who have no experience of oppression politics or identity who oppose these things and say liberation is divisive and it's always people like him who are straight white men.”
Feminism in practice

Anarchism

The above discussion of manarchism, and resistance to feminism within anarchist movements particularly, illustrates the contested location of feminism within non-feminist social movements. Repudiation of gendered analyses of privilege and oppression by individuals within these movements is at odds with anarchist political theory and provides a glimpse of the lived reality of feminist women striving for women’s liberation as part of wider social justice struggles. For self-identifying feminists like my interviewees, gender injustice is made visible through the gender lens that feminism inculcates. In light of the micro-level experiences of sexism and anti-feminism that have been illuminated here, I asked my interviewees about how well they felt anarchism or environmentalism as wider ideologies and global movements addressed women’s issues. Their responses demonstrated a disjuncture between the circulation of feminist discourses at macro and micro levels, particularly within anarchism. Chrissy identified incongruence between the theory espoused by anarchists, and the realities of their practice:

I guess as an abstract idea they absolutely have to fit into each other, like if you believe in having no god and no masters and everyone being equal then that has to extend to gender equality, it doesn’t make sense you can’t have anarchism without feminism, except for when you do!

Lena emphasised the intellectual interactions between anarchism and feminism:

In its concern to be radically disruptive and its interest in disrupting normative familial patterns, so polyamory for example, it’s quite good at gender I think and my sense of gender feeds quite well into anarchism.

However, she also contrasted this successful integration of anarchist and feminist theories of structural oppression with her own experience of sexism in practice:

When a lot of the bigger structural legal issues around women being made legally subordinate to men have disappeared and yet we still have this situation in which women are subordinate to men, anarchism is particularly good at recognising that. But also, you know, the whole manarchist phenomenon is a thing and theoretically it all
works well but I don’t know, in practice it’s still riddled with patriarchy really, but as is pretty much any organising space.

In her study of Mujeres Libres in Spain, Acklesberg (1985:76) notes how “the movement’s practice seemed ‘out of sync’ with its theory” (as documented in Chapter 3), and yet over 80 years on the anarchist movement in the UK and elsewhere seems to be struggling with the same situation. The disjuncture between anarchist theory and practice is such that anarchafeminist activists have begun to write about the sexism and misogyny that operate within movement spaces to oppress and subordinate women (No Pretence 2011). Yet the scale on which these offences occur ranges from the most visible or identifiably problematic, such as sexual violence and aggressive confrontation, to the more insidious and mundane. Chrissy drew attention to these small acts of sexism that are embedded within everyday interactions, identifying the difficulty in addressing microaggressions as a form of sexism that disrupts the application of anarchist theories of domination. At a protest camp we both attended, a small mixed group of us were gathered by one of the tents during a break in the workshop programme. In the course of conversation we began speaking about our experiences of sexism as female activists and during our interview Chrissy brought up this conversation to illustrate the subtle nature of male privilege within these spaces:

I don’t know if you were there at [protest camp] but [male activist] said something about not oppressing women and I was saying ‘your point would have been made much better if you hadn’t spoken over a woman to say it’.

In a subtler example of the mansplaining phenomenon than those discussed previously, the male activist in question had attempted to express solidarity with the women present, yet had exercised his male privilege in order to do so by speaking over a woman expressing a similar view. While he had an appreciation of and empathy for the feminist discourse operating within the conversation, his translation of this theory into practice was disrupted by the lack of awareness of the power relations operating in the interaction. This failure of anti-oppressive praxis can be seen as symptomatic of the status of feminism within anarchist social movements: present and at times acknowledged, but not yet fully realised.
Environmentalism

While the women interviewed related experiences of resistance to feminist narratives in micro-level interactions, those organising in formalised environmental groups also raised concerns about a lack of gender-sensitive discourses in the campaigns run by their organisations. As Chapter 6 illustrated, those of my interviewees who work within the environmental NGO sector are conscious of the limited extent to which gender and diversity issues are acknowledged and addressed within their organisations. The gender mainstreaming approach taken by most ENGOs is indicative of the lack of integration of ecofeminist philosophy in the wider environmental movement. Responses from interviewees whose activism is based partially or predominantly within these environmental organisations demonstrate a particular concern around the limited currency that feminist analyses of gender-based inequalities possess. Zoe attributed this to what she perceived as “a lot of gender blindness in the environmental movement” that constrains attempts to apply a gender lens to issues such as climate change, food, and population.

Scholars have identified gender bias and discrimination as a primary source of women’s global poverty (Chant 2007; Jacobson 1996; Sethuraman 1998). Furthermore, women and children have been noted as the most vulnerable and least resilient to the impacts of climate change because of poverty and lack of access to resources (Demetriades and Esplen 2010; Denton 2000; Terry 2009). Yet the women I interviewed did not identify the presence of these theories within their own organisations. When I asked Sabreen how well she thought environmentalism addressed women’s issues she responded that, “I don’t think it does because I’ve never heard it explicitly connected.” While the gendered effects of climate change are beginning to be identified globally at an academic and policy level, there was little evidence from my interviewees that this was feeding into activist critiques at a national or local level. Michelle works for an international environmental NGO and as such is familiar with gender discourses operating at an international level, but was concerned by the lack of engagement with these discourses more locally:

So there’s a big constituency of women’s gender organisations internationally, I’d say there’s not much cross-over between that constituency and the mainstream
environmental constituency... In the UK and more generally within the environmental movement is there a feminist discourse that says you have to treat women right within your movement? I’d say a little bit but not really, it depends who you’re talking to and where you are in the movement.

Michelle described how as part of her work she had developed a programme of capacity-building to be delivered with groups she works with internationally. On presenting it to the board of directors they decided that the work was too large a project for the resources available and needed to be reduced in size and content. However, rather than sending the strategy paper back for revision, the all-male board “decided what the least important thing was and they took out gender.” Michelle expressed extreme frustration not only about the process but about the lack of importance afforded to consideration of issues of gender within environmentalism as a movement but also within the organisations that lead on policy and social change. As she said,

It’s been really difficult to get mainstream groups to realise it’s something they need to work on. Which doesn’t mean they have to work with women on the ground in Africa, it just means they have to address our own organisations.

Naomi was similarly critical of the dearth of feminist analysis and discourse within the environmental movement in the UK. When I asked how well she thought environmentalism and feminism were integrated she replied:

I don’t think they do particularly. For me one of the issues for me is how we’re portrayed in the media and how we’re affected by things like government cuts disproportionately in terms of women raising children and things like that, it’s not necessarily my own experience, and just thinking about green groups and environmental groups I can’t think how the overarching goals, aims and issues have related.

Naomi’s concerns indicate a compartmentalisation within a certain type of environmental analysis that seems concerned with addressing environmental problems in a largely apolitical manner. Within certain sectors of the (mainstream, institutionalised) environmental movement there seems to be degree of reluctance to engage in critical debates about the culpability of a neoliberal capitalist regime. Over the course of my participant observation I had several conversations in which people
voiced their frustration that some of the most prominent environmental organisations in the UK are too reticent about identifying global capitalism as the underlying cause of much environmental devastation and as such this obstructs the ability to make connections between ecological justice and social justice more widely.

While there is evidence that the environmental movement’s engagement with feminism is limited, Imogen indicated that this lack of engagement also occurs in the other direction. At university she was aware of the separateness of feminist and environmental campaigns and worked in her position as a student’s union officer to attempt to integrate environmental and other social justice issues. However she said that she found it difficult to get individuals from different groups, particularly feminists she knew, to come together in a unified campaign, indicating the lack of currency that ecofeminist (whether social or cultural) critiques possess within contemporary youth activism as I discussed earlier.

**Feminist praxis inside and outside movement spaces**

This awareness of the contextual variability of resistance to feminist critiques is such that there is a need not only for women to continue to work within their own movements to advance anti-oppressive pedagogies and practices, but also to step out of these spaces, as some of the women I spoke to are doing, in order to create feminist spaces apart from these political movements. In their identification of gendered inequalities and the production of strategies to confront and address these inequities, both are expressions of feminist agency.

As well as routine resistance to sexism within conversations, many of the women interviewed were engaged in forms of anti-oppressive pedagogical work within their movements of the kind documented in Chapter 6, whereby grassroots organisational strategies facilitate the development of DiY spaces that contest gender inequity. Debi, for example, has played a key role in ensuring that a radical feminist approach to sexual violence has been integrated into her social centre’s safer spaces policy as a means to increase inclusivity and support survivors. Beth has organised and run consent workshops and feminist discussions as part of larger radical gatherings, while Jodie has produced a zine integrating queer feminist analysis into the anarchist case for prison abolition. Furthermore, the popularity of feminist and anarchafeminist
discussion and reading groups amongst the women interviewed illustrates the way in which activist anti-oppressive praxis integrates academic analyses of gender and sexuality into social movement discourses.

As well as working to integrate feminist analyses into their anarchist and environmental groups through the creation of gender-sensitive policies and practices, the women I interviewed were also creating and participating in feminist spaces outside of anarchist or environmental activism. Skeggs (1997) found that the working-class women she interviewed experienced limitations and constraints on the space in which they could access and practise feminism. To identify as feminist was considered unfeminine, and to be unfeminine was severely stigmatized, thus feminism offered little reward (1997:140). As Skeggs concisely illuminates: “Most had neither the time nor the space to engage with what they saw to be feminism. Feminism, unlike femininity, did not offer access or movement into respectability” (1997:157). However, the situation was distinctly different for the activists I interviewed, whose social resources as highly educated, gender mobile young women enabled them to construct their own feminist spaces where none already existed.

As Disney described in her study of women’s activism in Mozambique and Nicaragua, women’s feminist agency has commonly manifested in women’s creation of gender specific organisations as a means of addressing gender blindness and sexism within activist movements: “As women have felt stifled and repressed within male-led revolutionary structures, they have ventured off to create their own organisations in civil society during the post-revolutionary periods that have explicitly feminist structures, goals, and agendas” (2008:42). Michelle is an excellent example of the way in which these women felt able to leave non-feminist spaces and seek out more women-friendly environments while still remaining committed to their activism:

I’d say now I do less stuff with the mainstream movement in the UK and more slightly outside it. So right now in my outside work life I volunteer with a local Rape Crisis, I run a little project around the language of sexual violence, and personal stories of sexual violence, and then I also work for some others to support women who organise in their communities in London, so that can really mean anything from, like one of them used to organise big lunches, and
some of them do more political stuff and we support them to do that work.

While she continues to work for an NGO, and retains contacts with activists in the anti-capitalist groups she formerly committed most of her time to, she has redirected much of her attention to spaces that better enable a critical engagement with violence against women and women’s communities. Similarly, although Beth continues to participate in anarchist and anti-capitalist organisations, she also chooses to work extensively for feminist causes, running initiatives on sexual assault, consent, and sexual harassment. Necessarily, some of this work occurs in an exclusively female space and in doing so it continues a feminist tradition. Women-only organising has long been a feature of women’s participation in trade union movements (e.g. Kirton 2006) and revolutionary struggles (e.g. Acklesberg 1985) but was a particularly significant feature of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the UK which, as Withers (2010) documents, “used women-only space as a strategy to challenge the male domination of radical leftist politics” (2010:693). In this regard women-only spaces create safe environments in which women are able to centre and share their own gendered experiences while building confidence and developing skills without the dominating presence of men or male culture. Reflecting on the debates that occurred around the inclusion of men in Women’s Liberation Movement in the UK in the early 1970s, Coote and Campbell (1982) contend that “women’s experience of getting together on their own, and the political imagination generated by their mutual understanding and solidarity, were too precious to forfeit” (1982:34). Although separatist organising led feminists to be decried as man-haters and extremists, the purpose of women-only organising during the Second Wave was to ensure the autonomy of the feminist movement: “In truth, the majority of feminists didn’t much care about the exclusion of men [...] They wanted their movement not to reject men so much as be independent from them” (Coote and Campbell 1982:35).

The issue of women-only spaces and women-only organising, while not something I directly questioned them about, was raised by some of the women I interviewed independently. To a certain extent this was prefigured by the significance of intergenerational relationships with other women for their political development (see Chapter 5). Lena spoke about a feminist DiY cultural organisation that she was excited
about joining, not only because of her interest in music, but specifically because of the women-only organising spaces it provided:

I feel like with feminist thinking there is just a massive thing where women need to organise themselves and to do stuff by themselves and to get a sense of their own autonomy which I think is really important and really healthy and it does seem to be the case.

What I found particularly interesting about Lena’s interest in women-only organising was that it represented a change in her thinking, a change that I believe had resulted from an increased participation in anarchist groups and as a response to the sexism and male-dominated culture she had experienced there. She describes her turnabout thus:

I used to be quite resistant to the idea of separate female organising, but now I’ve come to the conclusion that actually it’s quite useful. I don’t think that women should only organise in female-only space but I certainly think that there should be places where, like I think it’s actually really healthy to have female only spaces [...] I’ve definitely changed my tune on that because I think it’s really positive and really important and emancipatory for women to be doing that.

Lena’s original ambivalence towards women-only spaces was mirrored by Catherine who also experienced a similar shift in thinking. Identifying her own relative privilege as the source of her resistance, Catherine described, “I always used to question women-only spaces because I hate the idea of men-only spaces.” As an educated, middle-class, White woman who related experiencing minimal discrimination on the basis of her gender, Catherine could not see the need for women-only activist spaces. However, on deciding she wanted to learn woodwork and being offered a place on a woman-only course, a conversation with a male friend made her rethink her position:

He said ‘yeah, if I wanted to do furniture-making it’s easy for me, doing joinery is easy for me, you won’t get that opportunity’ and that really brought it home to me so I decided to go.

Although she felt confident in activist spaces, and did not experience a need for women-only spaces herself, Naomi was nonetheless supportive of their existence and recognised that her own positive experiences would not be true for everyone:
I have been in groups where there might have been suggestions to create a women-only space which has been really interesting because while I think it can be really useful in certain circumstances and I think it’s really good that those sort of spaces are being made, in these groups I don’t feel like I feel in the rest of society... I find these activist groups are a really safe space and demonstrate how I’d like to see it working outside of those groups.

The status of women-only spaces within contemporary feminist activist discourse is fractured, with arguments made for and against their existence. There is considerable concern about the threat to specialised women-only domestic and sexual violence services as the result in changes to government funding commissioning procedures. The increased importance placed on evidencing performance and quantifying outcomes has been identified as disadvantaging smaller, specialised providers (Hirst and Rinne 2012). In particular women-only and ethnic minority women-only services are threatened by generalist service providers as financial competitiveness is considered more important than the security and trust that specialist providers are able to deliver (Hirst and Rinne 2012:vii). However, women-only spaces are criticised by many queer and Trans feminists as exclusionary and reinforcing a binary system of gender (Withers 2010).

However, my ethnographic observations of movement practices found that women-only spaces created within anarchafeminist activism have largely managed to avoid these issues of exclusion by incorporating non-binary queer approaches to gender. As a participant in initial discussions about the potential inclusion policy of the AFEM 2014 anarchafeminist conference, I observed that the definition of ‘women-only’ was debated extensively, with passionate arguments made for and against the validity of excluding men and trans women. The resulting inclusion policy read as follows:

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Our conference is open to all people who are the target of gender oppression, by which we mean sexism, misogyny, trans misogyny, cissexism, transphobia and binarism. If this applies to you, you are welcome as long as you act in accordance with our safer spaces policy. We wish in particular to stress that, as anarcha-feminists, we take transphobia very seriously. Feminism and anarchism as movements have historically excluded and marginalised trans people, and continue to do so. Trans women, in particular, have been excluded from many branches of
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feminism. Because of this, we want to be especially clear that including trans women is a high priority for the conference.

(AFEM 2014)

As such, the women-only space created at AFEM 2014 accounts for a diverse range of gendered experience and is best understood as what Withers (2010) has termed a ‘polytrans space’: “Polytrans-friendly spaces potentially account for past experiences and present self-identifications of the people who enter them and implicitly endorse an understanding of gender as multiple and changing ” (Withers 2010:694). The significance of this position is that while claiming the right to, and importance of, women-only spaces as radical feminists did as part of the Women’s Liberation Movement, anarchafeminists specifically reject and seek to distance themselves from the transphobia that they condemn in trans-exclusionary radical feminism.

Conclusion

By focusing on the reception and utilisation of feminist thinking by activists participating in non-feminist social movements, this chapter has demonstrated the significance of feminist agency in young women’s confrontation and negotiation of sexism and misogyny within radical political cultures. The chapter began by identifying the ways in which interviewees relate to feminism as a pluralistic political project and the consequences of their political subjectivities. I situated interviewees’ embrace of feminist identities as a rejection of neoliberal, post-feminist individualistic conceptions of equality, but such feminist identification has raised concerns for them over personal attacks and their credibility as ‘good-enough’ feminists. Interviewees’ identification as feminist positions them within a global community of women experiencing intersecting gendered oppressions, facilitating a critical reflexive engagement with a constitutive community of radical feminist praxis. Their engagement with and confrontation of gender inequality and oppression within their movement organisations represents a performative form of feminist agency that serves to highlight the priority that they place of community and collectivity over individualism.

While I have theorised anarchism and environmentalism as ‘non-feminist’ social movements, this chapter explored their encounters with feminism, specifically the discourses of ecofeminism and anarchafeminism. Anarchafeminism was shown to be
more widely recognised and embraced amongst interviewees than was ecofeminism, and potential cohort and life-course explanations were suggested for this. The existence of theoretical convergences between anarchism, environmentalism and feminism potentially provides movement actors with valuable critical resources for addressing issues of gendered oppression and domination within the wider world, but their incorporation into movement practice was demonstrated to be complicated and incomplete. Interviewees related a disconnection between movement theory and practice, and this was epitomised by the figure of the ‘manarchist’, a male anarchist who espoused anti-oppressive theory whilst silencing and objectifying women. The use of terms such as ‘manarchist’ and ‘mansplaining’ demonstrates interviewees’ engagement with a wider feminist culture whose growth has been facilitated by the widespread use of internet and social media technologies by radical activists.

Interviewees responses to sexism and misogyny encountered within their movement organisations was shown to take a variety of forms, from one-to-one conversations with men about their behaviour, to the active integration of discussions of feminism into movement spaces, and the creation of women-only spaces in which to nurture women’s confidence and feminist allegiances. These strategies are representative of, and also expand upon, the anti-oppressive pedagogies outlined in Chapter 5 and the performative reinscription of femininity discussed in Chapter 6 as a means of confronting and challenging women’s oppression within social movement spaces. By applying feminist critiques of gender inequality to their own movements, young female activists are exposing the moral and political failings of self-proclaimed progressive cultures while simultaneously presenting corrective strategies that maximise the inclusivity of movements. As Disney (2008:42) contends in reference to her own study, “women’s feminist agency has grown as women have come to bring a specifically gendered analysis of women’s oppression into the revolutionary organisations in each country.” Similarly, the women interviewed here are enacting a form of feminist agency that provides a constructive critique of their own movements with the aim of improving experiences for women collectively, rather than on an individual basis. In doing so, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, they are engaged in a radical political praxis that has implications for the way in which we think about political practice and citizenship.
Chapter 9

An Activist Citizenship of Care: Women's Emotion Work in/as Activism

Introduction

This final findings chapter takes as its subject the emotional work\textsuperscript{11} undertaken by female activists, the motives for and means of doing so, and the consequences of this work in practical and theoretical terms. Crucially, I argue that within the movements studied, a significant proportion of the emotion work that sustains movements is undertaken by women, and as such is not always visible or valued. The association of both emotions and care work with femininity obscures and devalues work that is crucial for the continuance of movements and the wellbeing of individuals. I am not arguing that it is only women who undertake this kind of work, or indeed that all women are inclined towards caring behaviours, rather that there is a gendered aspect to the way in which this work is perceived and performed. In order to do this, the chapter begins with an exploration of the phenomenon of activist burnout, examining participants’ experiences of it and exploring the ways in which it is addressed on individual and organisational levels. From here I broaden the focus to examine the gendered nature of emotion work in movements, arguing for a politicised interpretation of women’s emotional care work as a citizenship practice that demands a collectivist rather than an individualist political identification that resists neoliberal discourses of young women’s political and civic participation.

Social movement organisations have been theorised as ‘free spaces’ (Buechler 1990:72) in which emotions are both generated and transformed. They act as spaces in which people can explore their own and others’ emotional responses to public and private events, “guided by the organisation’s ideology and goals” (Reger 2004:207). It is in this sense that these spaces enable the identification and creation of shared feelings and mutual attachments (Reger 2004:208) which are vital to the sustainability of activist groups. While Resource Mobilisation Theory emphasises the importance of key actors marshalling economic capital to sustain action, others have argued that

\textsuperscript{11} I use the term work here rather than labour in acknowledgement of Hochschild’s (1983) distinction between acts undertaken in a workplace as part of paid labour, and those acts undertaken within unpaid contexts with family and friends.
movement organisations are sustained over time by the personal ties and relationships that develop between members and encourage continuity and commitment (Taylor 1989; Taylor and Rupp 2002; Brown and Pickerill 2009). Such relationships are the result of intense emotional engagement on the part of participants and indicate an emotional facet to organisations that has too often been absent from social movement theory analyses (Goodwin and Jasper 2004).

The emotional aspect of activism was something that I had not originally sought to address in this study, making me guilty of Goodwin and Jasper’s accusations. While I was interested in how participants integrated their political and social lives, I had not included any affective questions in my interview schedule. However, the adaptive nature of semi-structured interviews, and the feminist interpretivist approach I took to the research meant that when, during the second interview I conducted, Ruth spoke at length about her experiences with stress and emotional exhaustion that had led her to ‘burn out’, I knew that it was an area worth exploring in later interviews. Doing so brought into view an emotional landscape of social movement activism that was littered with the exhausted bodies of over-worked activists whose passion and empathy could not sustain an endless political project of dissent without consequence.

**Burnout**

Burnout is a condition predominantly associated with workplace stress and its occurrence in person-centred occupations has been studied since the 1970s (Maslach and Schaufeli 1993). More recently it has been acknowledged as a significant feature of activism and social movements. Maslach (2003) identifies burnout as a syndrome consisting of three components, namely “emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment” (2003:2), emphasising its predominance in individuals engaged in ‘people-work’. Crucially, burnout does not result from individual failings of ‘over-sensitivity’ but rather is a response to ‘situational stress’: “burnout is not a problem of people so much as it is of the social environment in which they work” (Maslach 2003:xxiii).

The very nature of social movements, and the people who constitute them, are such that activists are particularly vulnerable to experiencing emotional exhaustion and burning out. The commitment and dedication of the women I interviewed, not only to
their communities, but also to their very practical efforts to make the world a more positive and just place, was all the more inspiring when acknowledging the other responsibilities they had. These included full- and part-time work, university level study, volunteering, and although none had children, there were undoubtedly familial and caring responsibilities that the interviews did not uncover. While most young women juggle similar roles, the amount of time that they dedicated to their activism was significant. Aside from one-off events such as protests and camps (which of course require considerable preparation and organisation), and regular scheduled meetings, participants also engaged in daily ‘background’ work sending emails, maintaining websites, signing petitions, typing minutes and issuing press releases. Though seemingly mundane, these tasks take on a heightened significance for those working to tackle injustices, making it difficult to not make them priorities, as Chrissy described:

If you think you’re trying to make the world a better place you take it really seriously and also you take responsibility on that’s disproportionate to what’s really happening if that makes sense, so yes you might be responsible for, I don’t know, creating a leaflet. And yes that leaflet will be responsible for creating greater awareness about anti-fascism or whatever but if you don’t create that leaflet, that leaflet isn’t what’s going to change the world.

Further to the importance of the work that activists do, the nature of this work is largely confrontational and oppositional. In dissenting from the status quo, activists pit themselves against the hegemony of the mainstream, requiring a deintegration from societal norms, one outcome of which is emotional dissonance (King 2005:152). Such dissent triggers not only societal condemnation for refusing to conform, but can result in violent repression by the state in the form of police violence and infiltration. The emotional trauma that results contributes significantly to activist burnout and in doing so poses a significant threat to the sustainability of movements. For social movements to be effective in achieving their goals, they depend on the efficacy and wellbeing of physically and emotionally resilient individuals.

Emotional trauma and burnout were common experiences amongst my interviewees. I interviewed Ruth as she was working to reengage with her activism following a period of exhaustion and depression. She explained that, “the timing of this interview is quite interesting because if you’d asked me a month or so ago I would have said no to this
interview.” After a year of intense activity and commitment to a number of projects and groups, as well as studying and working, Ruth found herself struggling to cope with day-to-day responsibilities and had to pull back from her activist work and suspend her studies. However, she found this particularly difficult because of how closely entwined her political and social lives were:

I really should have just stopped everything but the motivations are just so strong and just so varied for being involved in it. It’s not only wanting to do well, there’s wanting to feel like I’m providing and doing well, there’s wanting to make a difference to things I feel really passionate about, there’s the social thing of seeing people regularly. There’s so many different things entwined, and I guess the fear of if I stop going then actually am I out of the loop and it’ll be harder to pick up again.

This concern about losing touch with others was not uncommon and speaks to the degree to which activist communities engender friendships and contribute considerably to individuals’ social lives. There is a high degree of overlap between friendships and the social networks of activism (Valocchi 2010), indeed it is these very networks that play a significant role in generating commitment to social and political causes by way of collective identify formation (Friedman and McAdam 1992; Hunt and Benford 2007; Polletta and Jasper 2001). As such, by stepping out of activist spaces to recover, those experiencing burnout risk losing the very support they need at that moment. While there are steps that activists take to minimise the impact of this (Chrissy, for example, emphasised the importance of maintaining a sub-group of friends who have no connection to activism), it remains a phenomenon that requires concerted efforts to address within social movement communities if they are to be truly inclusive, supportive and sustainable.

I interviewed Anushka at a time when she was taking time away from activism as she used to engage in it, dedicating less of her time and energies to specific groups and campaigns and taking time instead to reflect and focus on living a sustainable life while contributing to a limited number of specific time-limited actions. In describing her own experience of burning out, Anushka made reference to all three components of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach 2003). Her emotional exhaustion was evident from her
feelings of fatigue and crying all the time, while depersonalisation manifested in a persistent cynicism and reduced empathy: “I just found myself being such a negative influence, like super cynical [...] And I found myself getting angry as well at people being naïve which isn’t fair.” Alongside this, she struggled to recognise the valuable work she was doing and put pressure on herself to do more, which only contributed to her exhaustion:

[I was] always feeling like I didn’t take on enough jobs, and I never gave myself much credit. I don’t know how much I did, I can’t really tell you ‘oh I did loads’ or ‘I didn’t do anything’ because I felt like I didn’t do anything.

Katie also described struggling with managing her workload and a persistent sense that she should do more. Although she believes that she has improved the way she deals with such feelings, it is evident that it requires a continuous process of reflection and re-evaluation to maintain a sustainable approach:

I’m better at not doing so much work now but it is hard, I carry it with me everywhere so it’s not like I can completely stop. But yes, I do really struggle and I’m doing less work now but I’m also finding that really difficult, I don’t know if I should be doing more, I don’t know quite how to settle myself because I feel under pressure to do more which is my own pressure and I haven’t quite got the answer yet.

Catherine’s burnout resulted from considerable increase in workload that is not uncommon in the run up to a major action:

I find it quite difficult to manage the way things towards a specific event escalate and escalate so that it takes over more and more of your time until, like a year ago, I was getting up at 7 or 8 in the morning to have a phone call about GM, writing stuff, and having phone calls and emails all day and going to bed at midnight having had about an hour off in the afternoon when I went to the allotment, and ate all three meals a day in front of the computer. And it was totally crazy.

Even where burnout was not experienced personally, participants knew of friends and fellow activists who had dealt with it, and as such had an insight into the need to address this destructive side of activist commitment. As Zoe explained,

I’ve seen quite a lot of friends get quite burnt out and once they get stuck on this idea that they have to be the activist
hero who can do all the things! And sometimes you’ve got to be like, maybe other people can do some things or maybe something just won’t happen and that’s ok, and that’s the really shocking thing to say but sometimes you’re like ‘we can let that slide’. We can’t be everything. I don’t normally let myself get into the state where I think I have to do all of the things.

Zoe’s awareness of some of the contributing factors to burnout meant that she felt she was able to limit her exposure to them. Other interviewees had similar methods of preventing burnout, both in themselves and in others. As well as taking regular breaks and holidays with self-enforced email bans, Ella is attentive to her emotional state and engages in the very emotional reflexivity that King (2005) identifies as critical for countering dissonance:

I am conscious of checking how I am, just emotionally with things, so if I feel like I might be getting close to burnout then I’ll take a step back. So it’s definitely something I’m very conscious of.

Chrissy, meanwhile, undertook a similar level of vigilance but in relation to those she worked with, engaging in emotional care work:

I’m quite good at making sure everyone else’s wellbeing is really looked after and recognising signs of burnout and trauma in other people and making sure they get the support that they need.

While seemingly effective, these practices remain ones that are undertaken at the individual level. The sense of individualised responsibility for managing one’s own emotional wellbeing has resonances with Giddens’ (1991) contention that the rise in therapy and self-help mantras are expressions of the reflexivity of the self in late modernity. Even Chrissy, who keeps a watchful eye on her friends and fellow activists, does so out of a sense of individual responsibility rather than as part of an organised collective response by the movement to promote wellbeing. With the levels of stress that activists have been demonstrated to experience, there is the risk that attending to one’s own and other people’s emotional wellbeing may become yet another responsibility that activists feel burdened with and unable to give up. In light of the situational nature of burnout and the collective nature of social movements, what is
required are collective responses to stress and trauma that are embedded within the very emotional culture of movements.

**Collective responses to burnout**

When it came to considering how well their groups and movements acknowledged and addressed emotional sustainability and burnout, interviewees had perspectives that differed between particular contexts, but largely they felt that it did not receive sufficient attention. Ella recounted her experiences and expressed concern that burnout was not being dealt with effectively:

> I don’t think people really talk about it a lot. I’ve been in quite a few groups and people disappear for a while, they stop answering phone calls and you don’t know what’s going on and you later find out they were feeling overwhelmed or quite burnt-out and instead of saying anything kept volunteering for things because they felt guilty if they didn’t. And I do think that’s something we need to do better at, at checking in with people to find out how they are and if they’re taking on too much and they can’t do it it’s ok.

Anushka went further by identifying what she felt was part of the reason for the high incidence of burnout amongst activists, namely a culture of activism that did not permit sufficient emotional engagement or reflection:

> They don’t find the space to look after themselves because you’re in a network where that’s not the norm and it’s hard to challenge the norm because everything’s about getting stuff done.

In elaborating on this statement, Anushka counterposed the perceived introspective nature of self-care and emotional reflexivity with the demands of a movement that is defined by its outward actions. In doing so she highlights the tension “between thinking and doing” (Brown and Pickerill 2009:33) that was evident in the disjuncture between theory and practice in anarchist groups discussed in Chapter 8:

> I haven’t witnessed much of it, the stuff I’ve been involved in, that kind of self-care. A lot of activist stuff is based around meetings culture and I don’t think meeting culture is set up in a way that might actually ask whether people are up for, you know actually ask hard questions about people’s capacity and whether people really want to do things. Everything’s issue-based – ‘I’ve heard about this thing, I want
to do this thing, I've got to do this thing.’ So that makes it really hard to do self-care stuff, the way meetings are set up.

This tension between thinking and doing that persists within many social movement cultures, and the ultimate valorisation of men’s ‘high status’ activism identified in Chapters 6 and 7, is inherently tied up with gendered emotional norms, which I will address shortly. For now though, although Anushka and Ella express frustration about the lack of attendance to these issues, the interviews and participant observation undertaken also provided examples of groups who are working to formalise commitments to emotional sustainability through the development and implementation of policies and procedures. In Ruth’s case, her organisation has been developing formalised policies and they have addressed wellbeing as part of this:

We’ve just written up our policies for the steering group and one of the health and safety ones is that we really recognise burnout and that we have to be aware of that, for both the organisation and the people, people won’t stick around if it’s too much.

Self-care and sustainability workshops were notable. Chrissy's group had organised a ‘sustaining resistance’ weekend that she was optimistic about, while Catherine and Anushka had both visited a retreat in Europe that runs ‘sustaining resistance’ courses that draw on Buddhist philosophy to develop holistic, sustainable approaches to social justice work. Anushka was enthusiastic about her experience:

It was a really well done week and really exploring ideas about activist burnout and exploring where it comes from and our different relationships to it, and what can we do to try to fight for something different for the long term.

Elsewhere, Activist Trauma Support (www.activist-trauma.net) is a website run by anti-capitalist activists that provides support and guidance online and by phone for dealing with various forms of activist trauma such as burnout, post-traumatic stress disorder and police violence. During my stay at an environmental protest camp leaflets for the service were handed round on the morning of the major demonstration to highlight the support available. The camp in question had a particularly proactive approach to wellbeing and sustainability. One of the working groups that contributed to the planning and running of the camp incorporated ‘wellbeing’ into its remit and as such had organised a dedicated space at the camp, the ‘Wellbeing Tent’, where people
could retreat from the busy, hectic main camp in order to talk to people about how they were feeling, to have a massage (much needed after sleeping on hard uneven ground), or just to sit quietly and reflect. Someone from the tent would make an announcement at each main meeting to remind people to take time out when they needed it and to emphasise that support was always available.

**Gendered emotion cultures**

As these reflections on collective responses to burnout highlight, the emotional cultures of groups and wider movements are central to the types of strategies that are developed and deployed to address wellbeing. And if, as Chapter 6 addressed, organisations are themselves gendered, then it is theoretically congruent to acknowledge that so too are the emotion cultures that develop within them. Gould (2001:156) describes emotion cultures as incorporating both the “emotions that are prevalent within a social group as well as the group’s rules and norms about feelings and their expressions” and as such are a particularly valuable way of theorising the various repertoires of emotional expression and engagement within social movement spaces. For Taylor and Rupp (2002:153), these cultures are shaped by ‘feeling rules’ established within groups and through interactions between participants. Feminist groups and organisations, for example, have been noted for their tendency to develop intentionally feminised emotion cultures that value mutual support, sharing feelings, and caring for the self and others (Reger 2004:212; Ferree and Martin 1995; Taylor and Rupp 2002). These expressive and reflexive emotion cultures may well be a contributing factor to the moves some participants have made toward feminist and women-only organising explored in the previous chapter, particularly when considered in contrast to the less reflexive emotion cultures of groups such as those referred to by Ella and Anushka above.

In many non-feminist movements, emotional reflexivity is problematized as narcissistic; as inward-looking and an unnecessary distraction from the important ‘doing’ of politics and activism (Brown and Pickerill 2009:33). At the root of these distinctions between emotion work and activism proper is a cultural adherence to Cartesian duality that privileges the mind over the body and as such the rationality of masculinity over the irrational, hysterical feminine. There are, Bayard de Volvo
(2006:461) describes, “gendered cultural expectations about emotion” and in an Anglocentric context (in spite of a degree of progress), emotional reflexivity remains the primary domain of women. Furthermore, women’s emotionality is frequently deemed problematic when it impinges on idealised notions of the political as rational and objective. As an example, my interviewee Jodie provided an effective insight into the “dominating Western scientific White male” influence in activist practice and discourse by describing the way in which feedback from audience members at a public meeting about fracking problematised women’s contributions as “too emotional”. As she explained,

there’s this aspect of it that’s ‘we’re allowed to be against fracking because it’s bad for the environment and for carbon dioxide emissions’ but if we say ‘I want to stop this because I care that my child is drinking clean water’ then that’s super emotional and it’s crazy.

Dualisms that associate emotionality with femininity are such that the macho cultures of some direct action movements, and the celebration of masculine gendered performances therein, marginalise the important emotion work which makes this very action possible (Brown and Pickerill 2009; see also Chapter 6). Feminist theories of work have illuminated the extent to which women’s work is often rendered invisible because of essentialist notions of ‘natural’ and innate feminine qualities. Women’s care work within the family in nurturing children, undertaking housework and domestic duties, and nursing the sick and elderly, have been highlighted as sustaining the dual systems of patriarchy and capitalism (Delphy and Leonard 1992; Walby 1990). Such work is rendered invisible by means of its ‘private’ domestic nature. Similarly, the emotional care work undertaken by women within social movements, in order to bolster the emotional wellbeing of both themselves and others, is all too often invisible. It does not constitute the ‘real work’ of activism because it is the ‘natural’ feminine behaviour of women who are already frequently positioned as apolitical. Critically, the framing of emotion work as women’s work serves to absolve men from engaging in it, thereby leaving the burden to fall to women, and/or, as Brown and Pickerill (2009:31) remind us, gay men as a result of the elision between femininity and male homosexuality.
In an interview with Ruth, she talked about the effort she puts in to ensuring that the group is welcoming to new members. Contrasting how the group can at times have “this kind of cold hard task-based approach” she recognised the need to create an inclusive and friendly environment if the group is to retain members by, for example, inviting new members to the pub. However, she worried that this is not an approach that has become normalised within the group: “I’m probably really the only person bringing that.” It is not, she said, that the (mostly male) members of the group are themselves uncaring or cold, rather that emotional expressiveness is not a dominant feature of the group’s emotional culture: “People have that as people but in that group it doesn’t come out very strongly.” However, shared responsibility for emotion work is crucial for the sustained wellbeing of the group, with evidence showing that where such work is shared equally, “care and responsiveness are reinforced” (Strazdins and Broom 2004:357).

Interviewees regularly identified their emotional care work as resulting from their experiences and roles as women. Several participants commented that women do more care work and facilitation because they are attuned to those issues due to having been raised female, and in doing so identified the role that gender socialisation plays in orienting women to emotional reflexivity. Jodie, for example, referred to a meeting where everyone was very stressed and there was a lot of tension. She felt that it was only successful because of her ability to facilitate effectively, which she attributed to her “emotional literacy”: “I probably have that more than the guys because of being a woman and my culture has encultured me with those skills.” Zoe also observed that the most effective facilitators tend to be women, and reflected on the role that “emotional intelligence” plays in this:

Good facilitating draws on understanding how to negotiate between people, how to get things going but not upset people and keeping their viewpoints in mind and how to bring the group together. And people who don’t have that emotional intelligence who are just like getting through the agenda and that’s not necessarily going to make a group work as well a group that really pulls together.
In the first instance, Chrissy characterised her own care work as maternal, emphasising the physical acts of caring that contribute to the emotional wellbeing of her fellow activists.

Everyone always jokes that I’m a bit of a mother hen when we’re out [legal observing] you’re there to look after people and there’s something quite maternal about that. I usually bring extra water, extra food, extra clothes and actually physically look after people when they’re out and I think that’s very maternal. I’m mothering people and making sure they’re safe and making sure they’re looked after.

However, what was most interesting about talking to Chrissy was that as she spoke about the emotional care work she undertakes, her perspective shifted from one of socialised gender roles, to one that emphasised collectivism in the sustainability of social movements. Following her statement about bringing extra food and water for other activists, I asked whether she felt that such acts were appreciated, to which she replied that it is often the role of an individual embedded within an affinity group. During an action, there are those who engage directly in arrestable civil disobedience (of the type identified in Chapter 6 as ‘macho stunts’): scaling buildings to drop banners, supergluing themselves to doors or vehicles, or lying on the ground to create road blocks, for example. But they are dependent upon others acting in support roles to liaise with the police, to report on the action to the media, to act as diversions and look-outs, and to provide physical and emotional support. As such, Chrissy contended that attending to people’s emotional and physical wellbeing during actions is “not something that is completely separate from ‘proper spiky activism’; it’s an integral part of it.” From here Chrissy began to uncouple care work from a gendered performance of a certain kind of maternal femininity, and instead reframe it as an act of solidarity

Maybe it’s more about solidarity than mothering. It’s not so sort of ‘I’m looking after you because you can’t look after yourself’ but ‘we’re all looking after each other’.

Conceived as solidarity, young women’s emotion work is encouraging the type of emotional reflexivity and mutual aid that is necessary for the sustainability of individual activists and movements more widely. In this sense emotional reflexivity and an ethics of care are fundamentally prefigurative acts that seek to undo gender as it is
related to care work, and to broaden understandings of what counts as activism. As Brown and Pickerill (2009:30) argue, the emotion cultures of particular activist spaces serve to socialise individuals into appropriate repertoires of emotional engagement. This is aided by formal and informal learning that takes place whereby skills are shared and tools are developed to address and manage emotions. Informally, women’s emotional care work takes the form of check-ins and personal conversations. More formally, sustainability workshops and health and safety policies encourage activists to actively reflect on the role of emotions for their interpersonal relationships, their physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing, and the efficacy of the group and its activism. However, if this socialisation process is to be truly effective at building a supportive environment in which all activists are encouraged to participate in a reciprocal culture of care and emotional reflexivity, attempts to decouple emotion work from its gendered signified of femininity must be more explicit. Organisational strategies need to be developed that work consciously to reframe emotional care work as solidarity rather than women’s nature, thereby building an emotion culture that is not dependent on the invisible, devalued work of women.

**An ethical citizenship of care**

Gilligan (1982) argues for an ethic of care as a form of gender differentiated moral reasoning, juxtaposed with an ethics of justice. An ethics of care emphasises the contextual, particular and relational nature of feminine moral reasoning, in contrast to the abstract and universal nature of a masculine ethics of justice. However, this dichotomy risks essentialising gender difference and reinforcing a public/private division (Lister 1997:100), a problem that MacGregor (2004) has identified in relation to ecofeminist discourse. Tronto (1987) has instead called for a degendering of care on the basis that women’s caring is a reflection not of biological or psychological difference but of the social division of labour. A degendering of care serves to illuminate both its universality and its contextuality. Care should be considered, she argues, as “a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (Fisher and Tronto 1990:40). By theorising care as a ‘species activity,’ Tronto (1996) emphasises its political and collective role: “Putting care first reshapes out view of the relation between public and private life and transforms political values” (Tronto 1996:144).
While an essentialised notion of a feminine ethics of care reinforces women’s position in the private sphere and, as MacGregor (2004:57) warns, reduces “women’s ethico-political life to care”, a degendered understanding of care serves to reposition traditionally feminine caring activities as political, without requiring women alone to undertake them.

An understanding of care as a political concept illustrates how the young women in the study are engaged in a progressive, collective form of citizenship that has at its heart an ethics of care. The care work that women engage with at the micro and meso levels described above is replicated at the macro level in their political ideology and social movement activism. As self-identified anarchists, environmentalists, and feminists, these women claim a collective identity that recognises their position as members of a wider movement that is broadly striving for similar aims. Their commitment to social and environmental justice is rooted in an epistemic-political strategy to “render visible dismissed or marginalised experiences” (Puig del la Bellacasa 2010:165); both their own and those of others. By participating in social movement activism and leading campaigns, they are positioning themselves as active agents, as citizens whose critical voices they demand be heard and refuse to either remain silent and apathetic, or accede to engagement in the acquiescent modes of participation offered to them by the state. In particular, their commitment to collective political organising through social movement activism presents a direct challenge to the forms of individualised neoliberal citizenship that are promoted to and expected of young women.

Care is of central importance to social movements because it “allows us to reconceive equality in such terms of mutual interdependence” (Tronto 1996:149). As a ‘species activity’ care is universal, received and given by everyone in some form during their lives, and yet it is also particularistic in the ways and contexts in which it operates. Care illuminates the moments in which we are dependent on others, and those in which others are dependent on us. By way of this, care inspires a “recognition of our mutual states of dependence and conditions of vulnerability [and thereby] provides a different basis for equality” (Tronto 1996:149); an equality that tolerates difference, vulnerability and interdependence without reducing or denying agency and autonomy.
The women in the study care for and about their fellow activists, demonstrated not only in their most visible care work discussed earlier but also in their concern for and commitment to anti-oppressive practice as discussed in Chapter 6. Beyond this and on a larger scale, participants are politicising their care for the oppressed and the marginalised through activism: for the working class forced from their homes by the Coalition government’s ‘bedroom tax’ and who face destitution as a result of benefits sanctions; for the communities who are confronted with the threat of exploratory drilling for shale gas in their area; for the global poor who are most immediately affected by environmental destruction and climate change; for badgers and foxes being culled because they are inconvenient to industrialised modes of farming; for victims of the prison industrial complex; for future generations who will live with the consequences of political decisions about the environment. Megan wrote in her diary to explain why she does the work she does:

I believe that the way we live is damaging the planet and will result in millions, or even billions of people dying if we don’t find a solution fairly soon. I don’t want to be sat in an armchair as an old lady, having watched all these people die, and know that I did nothing to stop it.

The belief in social justice and an ethic of care that these young women profess is rooted not only in the progressive and emancipatory politics of anarchism and environmentalism, but also in their feminism. Sevenhuijsen (1998:5) reasons that the feminism that emerged at the end of the 1960s sought to provide women with alternatives to the monotony and drudgery of women’s traditional caring roles: to recognise that the lives of women were restricted and constrained by their responsibility for care. As an “obstacle to self-fulfilment” care “could certainly not provide an identity for modern women in search of independence” (Sevenhuijsen 1998:5). Nonetheless, in the period since the emergence of feminism’s second wave, care has continued to preoccupy not only feminist academics but also feminist activists for whom issues of care and caring have been at the heart of activism around women’s health, child care and the welfare state. A politicised understanding of care, as Tronto promotes, emphasises not the independence that Sevenhuijsen (1998) references, but an interdependence that my interviewees have highlighted as central to sustaining social movement organisations and to mobilising others to act. It is this quest for
interdependence, and the care that is so central to it, that provides these young women with a powerful identity rooted in action, agency and empathy. Taft (2011) in particular has identified the importance of emotions and care for the political participation of this group: “mobilising young people for social change requires the production of a form of oppositional consciousness that is not merely based in knowledge and facts, but in feelings and desires” (2011:122). A political theory of care informs not only what constitutes the political, but also how politics can and should be done because, as Tronto argues, “care is both a goal (a collective ideal) and a strategy (a way to affect the outcome of a political conflict) (Tronto 1996:143). A politics of care takes the feminist mantra of ‘the personal is political’ by expanding the nature of the political, and goes further by helping us to understand the most effective, and just, ways of addressing these issues.

Tronto argues that care can be practiced by everyone and that care is a practice “that can inform the practices of democratic citizenship” (1993:167). Similarly, Sevenhuijsen (1998) argues for the place of an ethics of care in conceptions of citizenship. Critically, the integration of an ethics of care into citizenship has a dual effect: “the concept of citizenship will be enriched and thus better able to cope with diversity and plurality, and care will be ‘de-romanticized’, enabling us to consider its values as political virtues” (Sevenhuijsen 1998:15). As feminist political theorists have highlighted, traditional theories of citizenship have all too often excluded women due to the segregation of the private sphere of the home and the family from public political discourse (e.g. Lister 1997; Pateman 1988; Walby 1990). However, the centrality of interdependence to an ethics of care stands in contrast not only to the liberal political tradition that emphasises an independent, detached individual (male) citizen, but also to the neoliberal individualised version of active citizenship promoted to young women.

At the heart of widespread contemporary concerns regarding a ‘crisis’ in young people’s civic and political engagement discussed in Chapter 2 lies a hegemonic dualistic discourse that counterposes the rights and responsibilities of young people as citizens. Harris (2001) has identified how a master narrative of youth responsibility dominates, whereby young people have a responsibility to prove their entitlement to
participate in social worlds. Rights are secondary to this responsibility and are rewarded where young people reject deviance and delinquency and participate productively in their communities. As such, young people are taught how to be good citizens through citizenship education, workfare, and national service programmes. In opposition to this master narrative, the counter narrative proposes that political participation needs to be made more attractive to young people and must address the way in which young people’s voices are currently ignored and dismissed. In order to do so schemes such as youth parliaments and youth forums have been established to encourage young people to participate in institutionalised politics. However, nowhere within this dualistic discourse is there space for an understanding of young people’s disengagement from formalised politics as a form of resistance and dissent. Young women are at the heart of government initiatives to tackle youth apathy and civic disengagement, and yet many young women strongly resist programmes designed to inculcate a sense of ‘acquiescent participation’ in a political and social field with which they are disillusioned and disenfranchised (Harris 2001).

The young women in this study are at first glance examples of what Anita Harris (2004a) has termed ‘can-do girls’. They are educationally successful, employed and employable, socially and financially independent. As such they are “the ideal neoliberal subjects for post-industrial society” (Nayak and Kehily 2008:52) and the main way in which they are expected to participate as citizens is through consumption. New Right (and later New Labour) policies of marketisation encourage citizens to exercise ‘choice’ within a market of previously public services, resulting (in theory) in empowered citizens who are positioned to be able to make organisations more accountable (Prior et al 1995:15). Young women in this context are “invested in as those least likely to hold on to modern identities or collective practices, especially political ones, and therefore best positioned to prevail in times that demand individualisation and the forfeit of a traditional rights-based citizenship identity” (Harris 2008:425). Of course this new mode of enacting citizenship is restricted only to those whose financial situation allows them to fully participate and for many young women, including those in this study, a citizenship centred on consumption is contentious and problematic (Harris 2001; 2004b). Contrary to the individualised citizenship of consumption promoted to young women under neoliberalism, the ‘wilful women’ in this study, and
those participating in other social movements, are engaged in practices of what Sparks (1997) terms ‘dissident citizenship’ – “the practices of marginalised citizens who publicly contest prevailing arrangements of power by means of oppositional democratic practices that augment or replace institutional channels of democratic opposition when those channels are inadequate or unavailable. Instead of voting, lobbying or petitioning, dissident citizens constitute alternative public spaces through practices such as marches, protests, and picket lines; sit-ins, slow-downs and clean-ups; speeches, strikes and street theatre” (1997:75). Furthermore the anti-consumerist, care-based political practice that I have documented here provides a strong contrast through which disempowering, apolitical and acquiescent forms of civic engagement are being challenged. The young women in this study are working collectively to voice criticism of the political and social status quo and are doing so in such a way that emphasises the value of interdependence over individualism and re-visions young women’s citizenship practice as centred around collectivism, action and care.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the ways in which young female activists are engaged in emotional care work at interpersonal, organisational and ideological levels. Through an examination of experiences of and attitudes towards burnout, I have highlighted the way in which the women in this study, and within social movements more generally, shoulder an unequal burden in relation to the maintenance of emotional wellbeing amongst activists. Gendered emotion cultures have been demonstrated to feminise concern for emotional wellbeing and in certain types of direct action organisations machismo serves to limit the range of acceptable emotions. As a result, introspection and the type of emotional reflexivity that has been shown to prevent burnout are dismissed as an egocentric distraction from ‘real’ activism. The activists interviewed, however, recognise the importance of self-care to sustaining individual and collective activism in the face of often hostile public opinion and police behaviour. Furthermore, they recognise that undertaking this work as women results not from a biologically essential nature but rather from their social roles associated with femininity and womanhood. This recognition of the socially constructed nature of women’s emotional care work means that they demand more of the communities they are working within
to address care as a political rather than an individual issue. By emphasising the importance of emotional wellbeing and caring to the sustainability of social movement organisations, they are able to begin to work to redefine such acts not as those of women but as those of activists. In considering the interdependent relationships that facilitate activism, care becomes an act of solidarity in support of overall political goals rather than the individualised and devalued acts of women. The development of practices and policies addressing wellbeing and burnout within activist organisations contributes to the emergence of inclusive, progressive emotion cultures in which emotional reflexivity is no longer derided as narcissistic but is instead considered a crucial aspect of prefiguration.

Inspired by Chrissy’s determination of care work as solidarity the chapter then turned to consider the value of a degendered political theory of care for understanding young women’s activist identities. The interdependent and collective nature of the activism engaged in by these women, as well as their social justice-orientated ideology, stands in stark contrast to neoliberal ideals of young women as citizens. Contrary to the late modern imperative for young women to develop flexible, individualised identities and engage in acquiescent modes of political and civic participation, the young women in this study are formulating identities based around a collectivist and care-based dissident citizenship that emphasises agency, interdependence and resistance. This final chapter, in its exploration of identities informed by interdependence and care, has returned us to the issues raised in Chapter 5. There, the development of political identities and orientations was theorised in terms of a form of relational agency whereby young women were inspired and guided to action by influential figures in their youth. Here we have seen that agency continues to figure relationally in these young women’s lives as they understand themselves as responding to issues that are larger than themselves as part of a loose-knit collective of concerned others.
Chapter 10
Towards an Understanding of Young Women’s Social Movement Activism: Conclusions from the Study

Introduction
This study set out to examine young female activists’ lived experiences of social movement politics as a means to understand both how gender figures in alternative forms of political participation and how this participation shapes young women’s gendered subjectivity. This final chapter revisits the research questions that have guided the project and provides an overview of the theoretical and empirical contributions of the research. After considering the limitations of the research, it then suggests potential areas of future attention that can build upon the insights gleaned here.

The research is located in the context of shifting gender landscape characterised by young women’s increasing opportunities but also by gender retrenchment and retraditionalisation (McRobbie 2008, 2009; Adkins 2003). Advancements in women’s rights and legal protections, in combination with increased educational and career success have created new subject positions for young women that were unavailable to previous generations of women (Nielsen 2004), and yet the very feminist politics that were central to producing these changes are now framed by postfeminist discourses as outdated and irrelevant. Instead, success and failure is individualised, with ‘can-do girls’ those who are best able to navigate the risky terrain of contemporary modern society (Harris 2004a). Thus, successive neoliberal governments have championed an ‘active’ citizenship for young women based largely on savvy consumer choices (Harris 2004a).

As such, the generation of women that this study is concerned with are, whilst being celebrated as “ideal neoliberal subjects” (Nayak and Kehily 2008), also the focus of concerns about apoliticism and disengagement that prefigure a crisis of democracy. The very individualism that is celebrated as freeing young people from ‘outmoded’ and ‘restrictive’ collective class identities also serves to sever them from established institutions of politics such as trade unions and community civic organisations that
traditionally bound communities together. However, the approaches that have produced such conceptualisations of a disengaged and alienated youth tend to employ narrow definitions of political participation that do not attend to the ways in which age and gender inform strategies for participation and do not account for new ways of doing politics in a globalised and digitally interconnected world.

In light of a political and ideological landscape of competitive and contradictory interpretations of young womanhood, this thesis set out to establish how those young women who are politically engaged and active come to be so. It sought to understand how and why those who may be perceived as outliers amongst an apathetic mass develop and sustain political agency. But in its feminist orientation it was also committed to developing a conceptual framework that integrated social movement interpretations of political engagement and action with gendered understandings of subjectivity and agency for young women. Thus it was concerned not only with how participants ‘came to’ politics, but also with how their experiences as political agents informed their understandings of, and engagements with, femininity and feminism. In order to do this it identified the structures of gender regimes that operate within social movement organisations, and the micro-level interactions through which gender is performed interpersonally. Critically, the thesis was informed by a need to understand why and how those who engage in social movement activism do so as a means of developing alternative understandings of political participation and contemporary youthful femininities that do not reinforce neoliberal postfeminist orthodoxies. In order to do this I posed four research questions that are provisionally answered here by drawing together the key findings of the foregoing research.

**How do young women narrate their experiences of ‘coming to politics’ and formulating political agency?**

In order to understand why the women in this study differed from those considered to be politically inactive it was necessary to understand the developmental process of ‘coming to politics’. The development of political identities and orientations is of central interest not only to traditional political science research (Hooghe 2004; Sapiro 2004) but also to feminist researchers (Hercus 2005; Scharff 2012) and those concerned with documenting youth and young adulthood (Gordon 2010; Kennelly
Theories of political socialisation have developed since the 1950s but the centrality of parental influence within these models remains. The experiences of the young women interviewed in this study challenge the primacy of parental influence within theories of political socialisation but do not altogether dispute it. Parents, and particularly mothers, have been demonstrated to figure significantly in young women’s orientation to politics, however for the most part parents were not themselves political activists. Rather, it is the lived experiences of the political nature of social life that informed their views and thus the things they spoke about with their children. Interviewees viewed their parents’ roles as teachers and other public sector workers as influential in the ways in which they engaged their children in discussions of the social relevance of politics. Furthermore, experiences of poverty and social inequalities both by interviewees and by their parents contributed to the development of critical understandings of the structures and processes of society.

However, the development of young women’s political agency has been shown to be informed by wider influences than just parental primary socialisation. In support of Pharr’s (1981) determination that oppositional models of political socialisation that separate familial influences from the influence of education and peer groups are inadequate, my research has demonstrated the extent to which women’s political agency results from engagement with a wide range of individuals and may be catalysed by specific mobilising events. The ongoing nature of these relationships is such that attitude development and behavioural orientation are incremental and multi-faceted processes that continue beyond childhood and adolescence. In particular, I have demonstrated how young women’s relationships with older women, frequently extra-familial figures that I have conceived as ‘significant (m)others’, served as role models in providing young women with positive alternative examples of womanhood that celebrate the independence, action and self-confidence that are necessary preconditions for political agency and self-efficacy. As such I argue that political socialisation is best understood as a form of relational agency, whereby young women’s understanding of their own potential and capacity as political agents is informed by, and undertaken in the context of, the reciprocal and supportive relationships and networks they have with others who nurture and encourage them. Relationships with others that influence young women’s political orientation are not
unidirectional or top-down but horizontal and mutual and as such inclined my interviewees to seek out non-hierarchical organising spaces in which to engage in activism.

Furthermore, I have demonstrated the way in which feminism has played a central role in the development of these women’s self-efficacy as political agents. From an early age, progressive gender socialisation served to encourage a critical and active girlhood in which structural and cultural inequalities were emphasised as issues to be confronted and challenged rather than endured. While many interviewees did not develop an explicitly feminist identity until later on, an early understanding of their group identity as women, and an appreciation of their resultant structural disadvantage, served to validate and encourage a politicised worldview. In this sense, progressive gender socialisation served a similar role to the consciousness raising promoted by the Women’s Liberation Movement as a means of collectivising gender identity. Moreover, progressive gender socialisation fosters in young women the attitudes, orientations and behaviours required for public, engaged action. Crucially, being encouraged to disregard or transgress conventional gender norms as children better positions young women to engage in traditionally masculine spheres of politics in later life. Believing oneself to be entitled to speak out and claim space, in spite of expectations of acceptable feminine behaviour, are crucial for young women if they are to effect, and affect, change. Progressive gender socialisation serves to instil in young women the sense of entitlement to engage proactively with the world that young men have long experienced.

**What form does their social movement participation take?**

Any exploration of the political lives of young women necessarily needs to understand the ways in which they engage with political issues and the means by which they take action. The young women interviewed participated in a broad range of activist activities and in many cases display similarities with the ‘alteractivism’ Juris and Pleyers (2009) have described in their conceptualisation of young people’s global justice work. As a form of praxis, alteractivism is concerned with emphasising process and the lived experiences of activism, with horizontal forms of organising, and with direct action tactics. As with the young activists in Juris and Pleyer’s (2009) study, the women
interviewed here are members of both formal and informal activist and campaigning organisations. Their activism is not restricted to a single sphere of engagement, and instead represents a pragmatic and opportunistic approach to political engagement. These young women are engaging with formal political institutions (through formal NGO employment, in the creation and signing of government-focused petitions, and by lobbying local councils and national government bodies) as well as through campaigns and direct action targeting companies and corporations (whether for their contribution to climate change, their role in the international arms trade, or their use of ‘workfare’). Their activism employs oppositional tactics that focus on external opponents but also seeks to create alternatives by way of direct action forms of social production through the likes of housing co-operatives, media and popular culture production, and community gardens and kitchens. As such their activism has both an outward focus (targeting political institutions and corporate bodies, engaging in public debate and discourse) and an inward focus (movement sustainability work, accountability processes, and organisational innovation). It is both global and local in its scope, and there are significant overlaps between environmental and anarchist engagement in the UK.

Young women’s activism challenges traditional notions of political participation by placing at its heart the contestation of the status quo and a refusal to conform and acquiesce to appropriate modes of engagement. All of which paints a picture of young women’s social movement activism that provides a striking counterpoint to perceptions of young women’s apoliticism, apathy, and acquiescent modes of citizenship engagement through consumption and formalised youth programmes (Briggs 2008; Harris 2001; Stokes 2005). Although their activism resists normative understandings of femininity as passive, dependent and vulnerable, and instead reframes it as active and physically engaged, it does not represent a rejection of the feminine. Rather, in their reflexive engagement with practices and discourses of emotional sustainability, they seek to broaden understandings of the political by promoting traditionally feminine care and emotion work as central to movement sustainability and solidarity.
Although the women interviewed were involved in public activism, including direct action and front-line campaigning, much of their activism was also mundane and quotidian (Harris et al 2007; Staeheli et al 2013; Wood 2012). Their activism involved caring for themselves and others in a context of neoliberal individualisation whereby the support structures of the welfare state have been rolled back, requiring resilient and creative responses to insecurity and precarity. Yet, rather than necessarily being widely praised as a form of prefigurative social movement praxis that challenges the dehumanising and mechanistic relationships encouraged under such political systems, instead such work frequently went unnoticed or unrecognised as work. As women, their care work was essentialised; perceived as the inevitable product of women’s caring and maternal natures rather than an activist commitment. The subsumption of care work under femininity resulted in this crucial activist work all too often being obscured or undervalued. The devaluation of ‘women’s work’ within activist spaces has considerable significance for the third research question that this study addressed.

How do the gender regimes of different social movements affect young women’s participation in them?

The application of Connell’s (1987) notion of gender regimes to the question of young women’s activism was critical for enabling a consideration of social movement organisation as gendered. While studies of the gendered nature of formalised work and education organisation and institutions have benefited greatly from Connell’s theory (e.g. Brown and Rich 2002; Messner 2000; Pease 2011; Yancey Martin 2003, 2006), until now such an approach has not been applied to the informal, grassroots spaces of activism. Specifically, Connell’s four dimensions of gender regimes (2002) have produced an understanding of how the localised operation of gender relations informs how gendered division of labour, gender relations of power, gendered emotion and relationship norms, and gender culture and symbolism with activist groups shape young women’s engagement and the roles available for them. While demonstrating that specific social movement organisation operate autonomously and develop specific cultures of activism and politics, this thesis has shown how gender regimes within these groups are informed by their engagement with mainstream gender relations, while also enabling practices of resistance to gender oppression.
The gendered division of labour within the activist organisations featured has been shown to conform to conventional horizontal gender segregation, whereby men’s masculinity is closely tied to physical and public acts, while women’s feminine skills are deployed in areas associated with emotional care work and back-room administration. As chapter 6, 7 and 9 demonstrated, women’s activist roles are rendered invisible in their perception as ‘natural’ women’s work, while men’s technical knowledge and participation in ‘macho stunts’ is celebrated as ‘proper activism’. Thus, men’s activist authority is established and reinforced through the operation of informal hierarchies of legitimacy that constitute the gendered nature of power relations, while a specifically activist version of hegemonic masculinity – once which privileges physical capacity, technical knowledge and an ambivalent engagement with feminism – was identifiable. Chapter 9 emphasised how gender regimes operate with the realm of affect, emotion and personal relations by essentialising women’s emotion work, while the gender symbolism of these movements at times serves to marginalise femininity by characterising it as insufficiently radical.

The most significant impact on young women’s participation was the organisational structure of the groups they worked within rather than the movement itself, indicating the significance of organising strategies for producing and reinforcing specific gender regimes. Hierarchical structures that have been associated with masculinist organising principles that privilege the ‘universality’ of the Western, White, heterosexual man (Rothschild-Whitt 1979) were demonstrated to result in a marginalisation of women’s issues and the formation of a homogenous leadership. The mainstreaming of gender equality was such that no-one claimed responsibility for it and policies in place to promote diversity were inefficient and garnered little praise from participants. While these issues have been reported previously (e.g. Külcür 2012; Taylor 2014), of relevance here was the explicit preference expressed by participants for alternative forms of organising, rather than conventional equality and diversity measures. In contrast, there was widespread (although qualified) support for non-hierarchical, horizontal organising strategies that better enabled the exposé and critique of power structures through anti-oppressive pedagogic strategies. The horizontal and non-hierarchical organisational structures that interviewees expressed preference for to an extent reflected the degree of co-operation and horizontality that characterised the
significant relationships of their youth, and serve to construct the preconditions for relational agency.

With reference to gender symbolism, movements and organisations that exalt ‘macho’ activism, that make grand public statements, and that involve risk or danger or demonstrations of physical strength, often do so at the expense of recognising the value of women’s ‘behind-the-scenes’ activism that makes this work possible. As such much of women’s social movement activism remains invisible because it occurs in private or because it draws on traditional feminine roles and skills exercised at the interpersonal level. The ‘menial’ movement support work such as childcare, cleaning, fundraising, and minute-taking are largely undertaken by women while men take the glory for direct action stunts, representing a gendered division of labour that underpins the gender regime. Yet at the same time that their activism is rendered invisible, their bodies are hyper visible within movement spaces. The invisibility of their activism renders them conspicuous as movement actors, resulting in an objectification and sexualisation of their presence. In spite of the increasing relevance of queer approaches to activist cultures – a form of ‘social movement spillover’ (Meyer and Whittier 1994) – there persists a heteronormative culture in which gender difference justifies the sexualisation and objectification of women. Young women’s negotiation of gender performances within activism and their attempts to redo and undo gender (West and Zimmerman 2009) are only partially successful due to the primacy of sex role categorisations that produce women as the somatic other (Puwar 2004a) in social movement spaces.

Movement organisations that have a more equal gender balance or consciously engage in an ongoing process of critical reflection and anti-oppressive work produce spaces in which women feel more comfortable because their gender regimes are less oppressive. There is evidence that many non-hierarchical, anarchistic movements organisations are developing and implementing what I term ‘practices of resistance’. These practices of resistance are critical because of their commitment to anti-oppressive pedagogic work within movement cultures to identity and address inequalities prefiguratively (Luchies 2014). The young women I interviewed were often actively involved in developing these practices and holding individuals and
organisations to account for instances of sexism and misogyny, as well as other oppressive behaviours. Their understandings of inequality were informed and inspired by their feminist identification, and the feminist agency that resulted empowered them to demand access to inclusive spaces, and to create them where they did not already exist. Hostility towards feminism and gendered critiques of inequalities was familiar for most of the women interviewed, yet they maintained that activist spaces are less threatening and sexist than those in the mainstream, suggesting that the prefigurative, anti-oppressive work that they are engaged in is having a positive effect in producing localised gender regimes that diverge from the societal gender order.

How, and to what extent, does identification as political actors interact with young women’s gender identity and performance?

For the young women studied here, their sense of political agency is intimately associated with their gendered subjectivities. They inhabit the world as reflexive, active, expectant and conscious young women for whom expectations around ‘appropriate’ femininity represent outdated concerns to be disregarded and rejected. Furthermore, they embody a feminist political agency that is conscious and critical of inequality but empowered to attempt to tackle it. As such they engage with the world around them not as the individualised subjects of neoliberalism but as agents located within webs of relations that are characterised by collectivism and solidarity. Critically, it is their identification as feminists that not only informs their critique of inequalities and strategies for resisting and confronting sexism within their movements, but which situates them within a wider community of activist women throughout history who have challenged and subverted norms of femininity and the public/private divide in order to demand and enact change (de Haan et al 2013; Queen of the Neighbourhood Collective 2010; Parkin 2000).

As feminists, anarchists and environmentalists, it is a conscious and reflexive engagement with political ideologies and structural inequality that informs their negotiation of feminine embodiment as activists, enabling a reframing of feminine appearance and acts as inherently political and active. These gender performances are imbued with intentionality (Alcoff 1988) and as such signify a resistance to both the normative ideas of the docile feminine body, but also to the objectifying gaze of some
movement actors. In spite of their educational achievement and social status, they are not Harris’s (2004) ‘can-do girls’, nor are they McRobbie’s (2007) ‘top girls’. Rather, in their conscious and forthright engagement with structural and cultural inequalities, they are ‘wilful women’. They are assertive and independent young women whose desire for change is empowered by their feminist agency and a commitment to solidarity with others. In their relationships with others, whether their parents, significant (m)others, peers or fellow activists, they position themselves as agents of change whose capacity is tied up with reciprocal caring relationships. Their politicised gendered subjectivity as young women enables them to reframe their care work as solidarity to sustain their own and others’ activism, while their playful engagement with the trappings of femininity displays conscious intentionality that reframes their actions against dominant theorisations of gender in late modernity.

The strengths and limitations of the study

As an in-depth, participatory study of young women’s social movement activism, this thesis represents a significant original contribution to the fields of knowledge in social movement studies, feminist agency and young femininities. It continues a developing theme amongst feminist researchers in the last twenty years of gendering social movements and advances this by applying a conceptual framework of doing gender within a neoliberal postfeminist gender order. The application of a theory of gender regimes to the realm of social movements contributes to an analysis of social movement organisations as organised and institutional, contrary to the view of them as “spontaneous, unorganised and unstructured phenomena” (Morris 2000:445) that dominated in the middle of the twentieth century. Indeed it makes possible an extension of the recent work done to integrate social movement analysis and organisational theory (e.g. Davis et al 2005) by introducing a defined framework for assessing the myriad ways in which such groups are gendered, and the consequences this has for their participants. In doing so it makes possible an analysis of the gendered structure that goes beyond simply hierarchical vs horizontal, but also considers cultures and representations of gender, and divisions of labour and power within informally organised collectives. A particular point of interest derived from this study is not simply the explicit preference that activist women have for organisations with more equitable gender regimes, but that such gender regimes, rather than being fixed
and immutable, are instead open to influence and reform through anti-oppressive pedagogic work that is attentive to the way in which power and privilege operate at micro, meso and macro levels. While such organisations draw influence from anarchist critiques of power and domination, what is evident from this study is the futility of such discourses if they do not integrate an intersectional feminist analysis that makes explicit the ways in which a multiplicity of identities and lived experiences are implicated in experiences of oppression and subordination. While feminism remains contentious and contested within anarchist and environmental groups, it proved to be widely embraced by the young women of this study, challenging postfeminist notions of feminism’s irrelevance and emphasising the importance that these young women still place on a theoretically informed political analysis of patriarchy and male dominance as part of their political ideologies.

Significantly, and relatedly, there is no evidence amongst the young women studied here that the individualism stressed by neoliberal postfeminist discourses around girlhood and young women has achieved universal uptake. Instead collectivism and relationality remain at the heart of the lived experiences of gender and politics for some young women. As such, an understanding of political agency as inherently relational, not only in its development through political socialisation, but also in its ongoing operation in activist groups, is required if future work is to adequately conceptualise the political practices and subjectivities of young activist women. Furthermore, for this cohort of women such relational agency is inherently feminist in nature, meaning that young women identify their shared experiences with other women and other marginalised groups through the identification and development of practices of resistance to unequal power structures. Counter to the supposed dominance of postfeminism amongst young women, my interviewees were avowedly feminist in a collective, political sense, and analysed their experiences and observations of inequality and sexism through a feminist lens. Thus feminism remains significant for young women not only as a political movement (see also Dean 2010; MacKay 2015; Redfern and Aune 2010), but also as a significance influence on their gendered subjectivities.
Interestingly, however, although youth was important for understanding the specific location of the women in this study, and for identifying them in relation to both generation and life course stage, participants themselves for the most part did not draw on their own youthfulness in constructing narratives of their political or gendered subjectivities. Unlike the girl activists of Taft’s (2010) study, participants did not emphasise differences between their own ways of working and those of older activists. I would hazard that this is related, in part, to the extent to which social movements are seen as youthful (Sawchuk 2009), populated predominantly by the “coming-of-age generation” (Johnston et al 1994). This is particularly true if these movements are analysed from a subcultural perspective, in which lifestyle aspects of youth cultures such as parties, music, and entertainment play significant roles in the form of social centres, benefit gigs and drinking.

There are, inevitably, limitations to the claims that can be made by this study. Although a concerted focus on young women’s experiences was necessary because they represented a group that had been marginalised by existing research, the collection of data on men’s experiences would also be valuable. In particular, the study of activist experiences, regardless of gender but using a gender lens, would avoid reinforcing a gender binary in which all men’s behaviour is problematic and all women are powerless. This would provide an important insight into the more nuanced operation of gender regimes by studying the ways in which they are experienced by men who do not embody hegemonic masculinity, and by non-binary individuals whose experiences may help to deconstruct dualistic gender categories.

The shortcomings of snowball sampling that were highlighted in Chapter 4 apply here, in particular the potential that networked participants may share similar experiences or orientations and as such the study may have excluded certain perspectives. One way in which to check the validity of the theories produced here, and to further observe the social construction of gender in activist communities, would be to conduct focus groups to observe different opinions and document interactions. The UK focus of the study, while necessary, may result in context-specific theorising that is not widely applicable. However, it does serve to provide a starting point for comparative research.
across not only other countries, but also in different social movements and activist contexts.

Implications of the research and priorities for future research

My analyses and findings regarding the political agency and gendered subjectivity of young activist women have a number of implications for the study of youth, gender and politics. Most importantly this study endorses calls for work on young people’s political participation to commit to approaches that emphasise and value the definitions and experiences of young people themselves, through the use of bottom-up methodologies and broad understandings of the political. In particular, this requires the continued application of a gender lens to the study of youth activism so as to avoid the treatment of gender as simply a variable in analysis and to address the marginalisation of women and girls in youth studies and political science.

My research has identified a number of potentially fruitful approaches to empowering young women to participate in politics broadly defined that are of relevance for future research on girlhood and women’s political participation. Of particular significance is the progressive gender socialisation of the type engaged in by some activists’ parents (as discussed in Chapter 5); the development of reciprocal, non-hierarchical intergenerational relationships between women (also discussed in Chapter 5); the creation and maintenance of women-only spaces (as outlined in Chapter 8); and the continuing integration of feminism into political theory and practice. What these approaches all emphasise is the value and importance of young women’s voices, serving to encourage girls and young women to cast off restrictive gender norms that associate femininity with passivity and instead reframe it as compassionate, active and assertive. The study makes a significant contribution to scholarly knowledge regarding young women’s resistance to individualising efforts of neoliberalism through feminism and activism and emphasises the need to conduct further research to examine these resistive and reframing practices. In particular it emphasises the need to attend to evidence of a collectivist orientation in young women’s political and social world view. It is only if it does this that we can truly do justice to the concerted efforts of young women who are trying to improve the world not only for themselves but for all of us.
Appendix 11.1: Participant Information and Consent Form

Department of Sociology

Consent Form

Project:
‘Femininity and Feminism in Movement(s): Exploring Young Women's Gendered Subjectivity in Activist Politics’

Aim of the research:
To conduct semi-structured life-history interviews with 30 young women who are active in anarchist or environmental social movement groups. Participants will also be invited to keep a diary for a period of one month to document their activist activities and reflections. Follow-up interviews will then be conducted, using the diary as a discussion piece. The aim of this research is to explore young British women's experiences of social movement politics and activism. This research is being conducted for a PhD in Sociology at the University of Leicester.

FOR THE PARTICIPANT:

- I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

- The nature and purpose of the research in which I am involved has been explained to me in writing/verbally.

- I authorise the researcher to use the data I provide but understand that my name will be changed and other identifying details disguised.

- I understand that while my anonymity is guaranteed in the PhD thesis and any subsequent publications, information disclosed to the research is not covered by legal privilege. As such I understand that if subpoenaed by a court the researcher will have to reveal any information requested.

- I understand that audio recordings are for the purpose of transcription of data and files will be deleted once transcription has occurred. Anonymised transcripts and diaries will be kept securely in a locked filing cabinet.

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• I understand that I can require that some or all of my comments are not to be recorded, or that I do not wish to be quoted directly.

• I understand that I can request a copy of my interview transcript and an electronic copy of any publications in which my responses feature.

• I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.

• I understand that I may withdraw from this research and remove permission for any data obtained from me at any point without having to give a reason for withdrawing. If I wish to withdraw permission, I will contact the researcher to request this.

Participant’s name:

Address:

Telephone number:

Email:

Signature:

Date:
Appendix 11.2: Diary Completion Instructions

Diary guidelines

Duration: 1 month

Thank you for agreeing to keep a diary. The purpose of this diary is to record your activism-related activities to provide the researcher with an insight into your participation in activism and social movements.

I am interested not only in the activities that you participate in (e.g. what, for how long) but also aspects of the following:

- how you feel about the activities you participate in
- your relationships with the people you work alongside
- how you fit these activities around other aspects of your life (e.g. work, education, childcare etc)
- what you get out of your participation
- your motivations for the activism you do
- the roles you feel you have as an activist/organiser
- general reflections on the issues that are important to you and how they relate to your life

Please complete an entry for each day you engage in some form of activism or group activity (e.g. meetings, discussion groups, planning sessions). This can be either in real life or online. You are welcome to write as much or as little as you like, but please note the date for each diary entry.

Feel free to write in whichever way you feel most comfortable – don’t worry about spelling or grammar. Pictures, doodles, diagrams or cartoons are more than welcome. If you have any flyers, leaflets or campaign materials related to your activities that you’d like to share, please include these too.

If you have any questions or queries, don’t hesitate to contact me:

Rose Holyoak
07826165627
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Appendix 11.3: Interview Schedule

Age/Ethnicity/Sexuality/Education/Occupation
Can you tell me a little about the activist groups that you’re currently involved in?
How/when did you get involved in this/these?
Can you describe the organisation or structure of these groups?
What forms does your activism take?
How regularly would you say you engage in any of these things?
What would you say is the gender make-up of the groups you interact with? Are they mostly male, female, or pretty much equal?
In terms of the roles people take on, have you noticed any differences between men and women?
What issues do you feel most strongly about?
Do you think these issues are as important to other members of your groups?
To what extent would you say your political and social lives interact?
Do you ever worry about working too hard, or burning-out?
Can you tell me about any other activism/groups you’ve been involved with, past or present?
Thinking about politics as broadly as possible, do you remember an identifiable time when you started being interested in political issues?
Were your parents interested or active in politics when you were growing up? Did they encourage you to participate with them?
Do you remember having any role models when you were growing up? Were any of them women?
What about now? Who inspires you in your activism?
What are your thoughts or feelings about feminism?
How well do you feel anarchist/Green politics address women’s issues or gender-based issues?
Have you experiences any barriers to your participation in activism? Is there anything that you would like to do but don’t feel able to?
When you’re participating in activism, do you think about how you dress and present yourself?
Would you describe yourself as feminine?
What does ‘femininity’ mean to you?

Do any of the activities you participate in have a particularly masculine or feminine feel to them?
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