WHERE IS THE “WE” IN ONLINE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS?:
RETHINKING THE ROLE OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY IN ONLINE ACTIVISM

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The relationship between social movements and social media has been the subject of much speculation and research. The literatures that resulted often put forth inconsistent conclusions about how significant this relationship is and how it may be changing social movements. This is compounded by the fact that analysis of newer social movements is consistently based on constructs and theories that derive from analysis of conventional offline social movements. These kinds of analysis commonly conclude that online social movements lack many of the basic tenets of what makes a genuine and successful social movement. This dissertation analyzes two online social movements, the Occupy Wall Street and Swan Queen movements, through the lens of social movements and communications theories in order to identify where these theories continue to apply and where they do not. From this analysis, I suggest that these movements are evidence of a paradigm shift in social movements. Online social movements have translated aspects of social movements into a model that blends both the online and the offline. I believe that these online social movements are developed through the construction of hybrid identities, where the activists display and negotiate a balance between their offline and
online identities throughout their identity markers, images and narratives that digitally represent who the activists are and what social movement they belong to. In their identity markers, images and narratives, activists are displaying strategies that bridge the gap between personal (identities, images and narratives) and collective (identities, images and narratives). Collective identity proves to still be a significant aspect of movement development, but it is does not dictate the “we” of the movement as it once did. It is hybrid identity that does this instead. It can be argued that social movements in general are a hybrid identity developed in order to make activism intelligible in the relatively boundaryless realms between the offline and online.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

I came here by myself… I would talk a lot about what was going on back there in the area [meaning at home]. I said I gotta get down there. I gotta be another voice, another body, another fist raised up, another signature to help stop the things that are going on. I feel if you are not helping the situation you are actually perpetuating it, you are not helping anything going on over here. I feel very strongly, and I came down here by myself, and I made a lot of friends here, and some friends that I had that were down here that I didn’t even know.

Vivian, The Occupy Wall Street Movement

I got involved with Tumblr in fall of 2012 and since then have only grown to love the community more…I never knew there were social-justice minded folks who loved theater and video games and so many other things that I love. I never expected that there could be thousands of people with whom I share so much. I know that there is negativity sometimes and I have seen people treated poorly, but ultimately, I believe that SWEN is about hope. We hope for love and family to win the day. We hope for representation in media. We hope that our collective voice can drown out the naysayers. And I think that’s beautiful.

Kord, The Swan Queen Movement

The statements above are from two different social movements, the Occupy Wall Street movement and the Swan Queen movement, yet the individuals are both telling very similar stories about their entrances into the movements that they would eventually dedicate their time and energy to. Inspired by their personal beliefs, they both entered their respective situations alone, but they found communities of like-minded individuals who shared their passions. This mimics the fairly conventional story of how people join social movements, with one exception. Most individuals did not join social movements alone. In past offline social movements, individuals joined because they were recruited (McAdam and Paulsen 1993) or because they knew someone who was already involved in the movement (Passy 2003). In the two social movements above, however, many individuals joined alone because they found out about the movements through online advertisements or social media posts. This deviation highlights a distinct transition in
social movement organization where recruitment into a movement shifts from face-to-face interactions and interpersonal relationships to online advertisements and interactions. This shift of movement organization from offline to online is reflective of a broader shift in the evolution of social movements, one that does not just impact the structure of the movement, but the movement’s identity.

On the whole, social movements are increasingly deviating from the recognizable forms that we associate with past social movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-War Movement. Earlier movements involved numerous protests in the streets and other sites of contention (Bruce 2013). These types of protest still occur, but now, a large portion of social movement activity takes place within digital space due to the increased use of information and communication technologies. In their analysis of the “ICT [information and communication technologies] revolution” in social movements, Earl et al. (2014: 362) state that whether or not researchers agree to consider the wide range of online tactics legitimate forms of activism, “it is clear that the kinds of technologies, tactics and movements that scholars study only continue to expand.” This expansion of technologies, tactics and social movements signals the need for a re-examination of the theories and concepts that were developed from and geared towards more conventional social movements. Despite the fact that this expansion started in the 1990s, many researchers have been slow to produce work that accounts for the complexity of online tools and social media (Earl et al. 2014).

This deficit in the literature on social media and social movements is problematic considering that the use of social media technologies is now a common and rather mundane aspect of our day-to-day lives. According to the Pew Research Center (2019),
72% of the population uses some form of social media and approximately 50% of Americans use social media for civic engagement and activism (Anderson et al. 2018). Though those in younger demographics are more likely to be early adopters and use the internet more frequently, other age groups are starting to use social media at higher rates. Furthermore, social media use does not vary significantly by race, gender or income, which means that the population of social media users is incredibly diverse (Pew Research Center 2019). Recent surveys show that people in the United States often use multiple social media sites daily with “roughly three-quarters of Facebook users-and around six-in-ten Instagram users” visiting these sites as part of their daily routine (Pew Research Center 2019). This suggests that social media will play a big role in activist routines as well, as activists will use the same sites that they access regularly for leisure activities for their activist engagement (Gerbaudo 2012).

There are a number of past studies that attempt to account for how the use of social media in general and for civic engagement specifically has impacted activism and social movement organization (e.g., Diani 2000; Garrett 2007; Eltantawy and Wiest 2011). However, it has been difficult to fully conceptualize this impact because, as Velasquez and LaRose (2015: 915) propose, “the more individuals participate in online activism, the more efficacious they become about their online capabilities.” The foregone conclusion of this observation is that the more efficacious that individuals become about their online capabilities the more they will continue to engage in online activism. Therefore, increased online use begets increased online use, which also leads individuals to experience a heightened sense of agency in digital spaces. The more attempts to introduce activism and social movements into digital spaces, the more these forms will
change. Consequently, activists are now tasked with adjusting to both changing political and digital landscapes, and according to researchers, the adjustments they are making are changing the face of social movements in general (e.g., Earl and Kimport 2008; Gaby and Caren 2012; Bennett 2012; Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Castells 2012; Milan 2015). Observations about the changing form of social movements are often where the consensus ends among researchers, as they often come to differing conclusions about whether or not ICTs play a positive or negative role in social movement organization (Howard et al. 2016).

Tilly (2004) addressed the lack of consensus among researchers in his work and marveled at the fact that some researchers truly embraced the initial introduction of digital technologies. These individuals went on to claim that digitally enabled democracy is the way of the future. Tilly positioned himself as belonging to another camp. He, and others like him, felt that the dream of “digital democracy” could turn into more of a nightmare, especially if it led to “continuous, electronically mediated opinion polling [serving as] a cheap, efficient substitute for associating, meeting, marching, petitioning, addressing mass media, and the rest of the social movement repertoire” (Tilly 2004:153). He describes this as a “frightening prospect for lovers of social movements in something like their recognizable historical form” (Tilly 2004). This particular conception of digital democracy did not come to pass. True, electronic opinion polling is a tool that social movements and other organizations use, but there continue to be marches, petitions and other aspects of the social movement repertoire. Despite the continued organization of the offline along with the online, researchers display reluctance when attributing significance to online mobilization, especially when it does not include offline mobilization.
Online tactics and mobilization are frequently regarded as a paltry substitute for other, more legitimate social movement tactics, such as those that involve physical mobilization. David Forrest (2019: 73) asserts that the emphasis placed on physical mobilization in the streets is not only prevalent for social movements specifically, but organizations in general: “Most audiences in the United States—from ordinary people like Vikings fans to elite groups like professional sports team owners—implicitly expect political actors to establish their democratic legitimacy through mass constituent mobilization.” This logic is evident in several studies that attempt to assess if and how social media contributed to offline mobilization. For example, in their analysis of Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street, Davies et al. (2013) conclude that social media played a crucial role in these mobilizations but was ultimately not a determinant of whether or not the movements would have occurred in general. Their conclusion suggests that social media only played an ancillary role in the uprisings and the most significant aspect of Arab Spring was the number of people who took part in the physical protests. Similarly, in Castells’ (2012: 222) analysis of online mobilization, he concludes, “while these movements usually start on the Internet, they become a movement by occupying the urban space, be it standing occupation of public squares or the persistence of street demonstrations” (his emphasis). This perspective indicates that becoming a movement is not in the establishment of a collective, but is in the transition of that online collective to the offline platform of contention. These conclusions suggest that online mobilization is relatively meaningless if it does not yield offline results.

In fact, some definitions of online mobilization reflect this reliance upon and preference for offline mobilization. One such definition put forth by Ackland and O’Neil
(2011: 180), posits that an online social movement is “a grouping of websites of actors who are participants in a social movement.” They qualify this definition by saying, “it is clear that an online SMO [social movement organization] is, from a data collection and analysis perspective, simply a website that is run by an SMO.” This qualification makes certain assumptions. First, every social movement is connected to a social movement organization, which Diani (1992) argues is not the case for all movements. The second assumption is that activists belong to the social movement prior to their development of/use of websites. This assumption, then, ignores the fact that many people become a part of a movement by discovering it online. Similarly, in their model of cyberactivism, Sandoval and Gil-García (2014: 369) outline the stages of activist development as follows: “(1) triggering event, (2) media response, (3) viral organization and (4) physical response.” These stages indicate that meaningful escalation of the online organization necessarily ends in the physical response of the activists involved. In the first definition above, the researchers propose that online activism is based on the offline dynamics of the movement and the second proposes that viral or online organization is only one stage of the mobilization process. These definitions demarcate a clear boundary between offline and online mobilization. At the same time, they suggest that the offline and online are interdependent parts of a social movement whole.

The insistence upon the existence of boundaries between the offline and online is another reason it is difficult to ascertain the full impact of social media on social movements. Recent research suggests that literature that overly determines the boundaries between the offline and online realms creates a false dichotomy. This is because the boundaries between the online and offline are not as distinct as they once
were; now they are fluid and fairly ethereal. Additionally, the online is no longer relegated to just one device; it can be found on many, which makes the internet and the communities that form on it highly “portable.” According to Mary Chayko (2014), online portable communities differ from offline physical communities in that portable communities can be carried with an individual and accessed whenever necessary or convenient. The portability of the community, however, does not at all detract from the potential for social connectedness. She writes, “people use communication technologies to build, maintain and experience social connections and a strong authentic sense of community, both with those with who they are geographically proximate and with those at a greater distance” (Chayko 2014: 985). This counters the prevailing understanding of relationships on social media as “weak ties,” which are “ties that exist among people one knows in a specific and limited context” and are “less costly to maintain” (Donath and boyd 2004) or “virtual inactive ties,” which are inactive ties that exist between an individual and potentially millions of others that they follow but have little to no interaction with (Sander 2012). Indeed, these kinds of ties do exist on digital networks, however, it is also important to recognize, as Chayko (2014, 2018) does, that the connections made online have a powerful impact on those individuals who engage intimately and emotionally.

In fact, there are studies that find that online interactions can be more meaningful than many would anticipate. For example, members of the Indiginados Movement used

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1 Some public figures also reinforced this critique. For example, Malcolm Gladwell (2010) was very vocal in his opposition to those who saw the “Twitter Revolution” as a significant turning point in the use of social media for positive social change. He claimed that the Internet is “terrific at the diffusion of innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, seamlessly matching up buyers and sellers, and the logistical functions of the dating world. However, weak ties seldom lead to high-risk activism”.

Facebook as a space where they could engage in emotional conversations, which allowed them to develop “mutual feelings of trust and solidarity” (Papa 2017: 595). Similarly, Marlowe (2017: 98) finds that online interactions “influence a sense of belonging that create a ‘situatedness’ that is more meaningful than what is often assumed in virtual spaces.” This “situatedness” seems to be what both of the activists are trying to explain above. They feel themselves to be a part of a collective where they can comfortably situate themselves, their interests and their intricacies. As this dissertation will show, this feeling of belonging that activists experience in their online collective cultivates a discursive environment where activists are inclined to share many personal aspects of themselves within posts that are intended for movement purposes. This finding is consistent with studies that affirm that when participating in campaigns for social change online, people are sharing content that is increasingly detail driven and personal (Bennett 2012; Agarwal et al. 2014; Milkman 2014).

This has led to, what some call, the personalization of contentious politics (Bennett 2012; Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Gerbaudo and Trere 2015). The personalization of politics occurs as people attempt to customize their experiences according to their interests and personality. It involves several of the following conditions: “an ethos of diversity and inclusiveness,” “the rise of crowd-sourced inclusive personal action frames” and participation through engagement with “dense social

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2 Other studies that attempt to address this gap in the literature find that people share personal stories online in an attempt to bypass the structural and cultural frameworks that dictate the appropriateness of stories and where stories should or should not be told (Dimond et al. 2013). The lack of barriers in online storytelling is a crucial incentive for groups that are often disparaged or misrepresented by the mainstream media. Individuals from these groups have the most interest in sharing stories and information that represents their perspective (Yang 2016) and allows them to control what they post and how it appears (Vivienne and Burgess 2012).
networks” like those found on social media (Bennett 2012). Therefore, the personalization of politics and the ways in which ICTs facilitate this personalization is one of the major factors that researchers believe impacts social movement development and movement identity (Gerbaudo and Trere 2015). There are those like Lance Bennett (2012), who argue that the trend of personalization is reflective of new generational trends in activism. He suggests that current generations of activists are searching for different kinds of connections and working toward different kinds of goals. Therefore, they have more diverse interests and prefer personal forms of expression because it reinforces the egalitarian ethos of newer movements. Others believe that this trend may adversely impact the ability of this kind of “social movement” to serve as a successful form of collective action. Milan (2015), for example, concedes that the inclusiveness of these new movements can be attractive, but that such inclusiveness (especially online) may hinder the development of a collective identity that is capable of leading to an active offline protest component.

By inclusiveness, Milan means that these movements are welcoming of a wide variety of social identities and political backgrounds. For the purpose of diversity and inclusion of underrepresented and marginalized communities, this is a very positive development. For social movement organization, however, this may not be the case. The more inclusive the movement identity, the less ties that binds those who belong to the movement. According to Milan (2015: 894), too much inclusiveness makes protest more of an “experience” than a commitment to social change. This is due to the fact that there are little to no barriers of inclusion online, so those who are even briefly interested in a movement or wish to display low-level solidarity can make claims that they belong to a
movement without any additional commitment. This is a more current version of the “free rider” problem (Olson 1971). The original free rider problem was that people who did not protest would receive the benefits that the actual protesters fought for. In this version, people appear to protest, they socially benefit from movement inclusion, but they do not fully commit to the movement. This critique of online engagement is further developed in the literature that argues that online activism is lazy activism or “slactivism” (Morozov 2011; Tufecki 2017). The feature of online engagement addressed in this critique makes it very difficult to distinguish between activists dedicated to making change and the average internet user. All in all, Milan’s major critique displays concern about how successful, or rather unsuccessful, online movements are at establishing a collective “we,” when individuals appear to be focused on their own social media experience.

Traditionally, scholars argue that the primary way that social movements establish a “we” is through the development of collective identity. Collective identity is a “shared definition of a group that derives from members’ common interests, experiences, and solidarity” (Taylor 1989: 771). It develops through comparison to other groups, especially oppositional or target groups. Social movements often result in one primary collective identity that is reinforced and reproduced in the process of establishing boundaries that symbolically separate the collective “us” from the various oppositional “thems” (Taylor and Whittier 1992). This concept of collective identity, however, is derived from analysis of conventional social movements. Online movements, like the ones discussed throughout this dissertation, display multiple and varied identities that they create in an effort to navigate the blending of their offline and online identities and
experiences. This significantly complicates the production of collective identity and makes it more difficult for researchers to identify. In her analysis of social media and social movements, Earl (2018: 300) claimed that because offline and online elements are more likely to be blended in social movements now, it may be “more accurate to think of the field as consisting increasingly of hybrid forms of activity.” I propose that this concept of hybrid action should be extended to analysis of collective identity, as I argue that online social movements are more likely to create hybrid identities than collective identities as social movement literature conceives of them. It is through hybrid identity that activists create a “we” in digital settings.

The concept of hybrid identity has been used elsewhere to describe the interdependency of movements and the hybrid identities that result from combining movement membership and resources (Heaney and Rojas 2014). Heaney and Rojas (2014) propose that there are certain cases where hybrid identities, or those movements that try to combine various movement identities, can be successful in addressing the activists’ needs for identity development and achieving movement goals. In these cases, movements like the Anti-War movement or the women’s movement may combine movement identities for the purposes of sharing activists’ attention, resources and media attention. They claim, “hybrid organizations have the potential to serve intersectional identities” (Heaney 2014: 1055). Their discussion of this concept, however, is limited to offline mobilization and predominantly focuses on the “identity + 1” model. Therefore, this model essentially reinforces the idea that movements are most successful when there are a limited number of identities present, with two identities being the most conducive of the successful mobilization of hybrid identities. Conversely, in this dissertation, I am
proposing a re-framing of this concept by using the word hybrid as Earl (2018) does above. I am using the term hybrid identity to reflect identity development of online social movements that accounts for the synthesis of online and offline identities and personal and collective identities. The creation of this kind of identity derives from the desire to navigate these divergent social realms and is manifested in the identity markers, imagery and narratives produced by the activists.

These three aspects of the social movements are the focus of analysis here because they closely align with Diani’s (1992) definition of social movements, which synthesizes various definitions from different branches of literature. He states that the essential components of movements are: “networks of relations between a plurality of actors; collective identity and conflictual issues” (Diani 1992: 17). He explains that these three components are fundamental because the networks of relations display who the activists are, collective identity displays how the members of the movement are connected and the conflictual issues are the social injustices, grievances and the efforts to bring about social change. When applied to online social movements, however, this definition can be used to identify the fundamental components of hybrid identity, where networks of relations between a plurality of actors are found in identity markers, collective identity can most clearly be identified in both identity markers and the visual images and conflictual issues are navigated in movement narratives.

This concept of hybrid identity derives from the analysis of two social movements, the Occupy Wall Street movement, a widely publicized networked social movement and the Swan Queen movement, a popular culture social movement. Upon first glance, these cases appear to be as different as two cases can be. One is a networked
social movement that is widely recognized by activists and scholars, and the other is part of a fandom, most often studied by those in entertainment and popular culture circles. How can these two cases be comparatively assessed in a study about online social movements and identity? Regardless of their differences, both movements established vast contentious discourses on Tumblr. Analysis of these discourses shows that both movements exhibited similar strategies of identity formation and that these strategies resulted in the formation of their hybrid identities. The following will provide an additional overview of why I chose these cases for my study.

Why These Cases?: An Examination of Social Movement Labels and the Logic Behind Them

The label “social movement” carries much weight when discussing collective action. Even so, there are conflicting ideas about how strictly social movements should be defined. There are those like McAdam and Snow (2010: 1) that provide very broad definitions of social movements as “a loose collectivity acting with some degree of organization, temporal continuity, and reliance on noninstitutional forms of action to promote or resist change in the group, society, or world order of which it is a part.” Defined this way, social movements would include a wide variety of social justice initiatives. On the other hand, there are those like Tilly (2004), who propose that social movements are established and legitimate when they involve sustained action over a period of time. According to him, a legitimate social movement would be capable of performing WUNC ("worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment") displays and they would develop repertoires of contention (Tilly 2004: 53). WUNC displays result in a movement that appears visibly serious about their cause; they would attire themselves in
symbols of the collective and would be willing to brace inclement weather and the possibility of getting arrested. This definition provides more stringent standards of social movement qualification, with a clear emphasis on the importance of physical appearance.

Researchers support this conception of social movements and establish appearance as crucially important in a collective’s bid to achieve and maintain status as a social movement (Edwards and McCarthy 2004; Tilly and Wood 2015). Edwards and McCarthy (2004: 125) argue that a social movement’s ability to acquire the resources necessary for mobilization is contingent upon whether or not it “closely mimics” institutions that are already widely acknowledged to be legitimate. Based on similar logic, Tilly and Wood (2015: 78) propose that one of the first questions asked about a social justice initiative should be: “Does this particular campaign, performance, or WUNC display resemble those that commonly occur in full-fledged social movements?” This question perpetuates the outlook that “‘serious’ protest targets the state and looks like a traditional march, complete with fist-pumping and chanting, preferably in a recognized protest space like the National Mall or a state capital building” (Bruce 2013:611, see also Snow 2004). The emphasis placed on appearance, suggests that anything that deviates too far from the appearance of a social movement should not be considered a social movement.

However, there are those who feel that this push to mimic what has come before hinders innovation in social movements and research about social movements. Some of the movements that are now regarded as examples of conventional social movements were once considered “new.” The category of “new” social movements that developed after the mid-1960s was said to push the boundaries of social movement research and
pose quite a “challenge to traditional theories” (Johnston, Larana and Gusfield 1994: 28). New social movements were categorized as a product of the “shift to a postindustrial economy,” which meant that they were “different from social movements of the industrial age” (Pichardo 1997:412). These movements placed more emphasis upon identity and individuality than those who came before. The same can be said of the movements that are developing now in the digital age. These “newer” movements are putting a much higher premium on individual identity and agency than the movements of the previous generation. For example, a recent study by Hockin and Brunson (2018: 2015) found that individuals who share live-stream footage of police interactions online reject the idea that their movement should look like a particular image of a movement in order to be recognized as significant and legitimate. In this case, the individuals believe that their collective efforts to reveal police corruption and brutality are strongly tied to their personal identities as victims or potential victims of this violence. The activists believe that their personal contributions should be taken as collective social justice when aggregated on a digital network and disseminated to a broader population to spread awareness. Despite the significance of these findings, the study did not provide a framework for how to understand this collective as a form of mobilization above and beyond that of individual contributions to a cause. Findings such as this reinforce the need for new methods for analyzing and assessing online activism.

The two movements discussed throughout this dissertation are also examples of movements that challenge conventional understandings of how movements organize and what movements should look like. The social movements included in this comparative study are Occupy Wall Street and the Swan Queen Movement. The apparent differences
between these movements could lead one to question if these cases are comparable.

Occupy Wall Street (OWS) was a movement that started in 2011. It rose to worldwide popularity as a result of the offline “occupations” that sprang up in numerous cities. Online mobilization played a vital role in the development of the movement, as many of the individuals who participated in the initial call to action found out about the movement online. The Swan Queen movement, which mobilized online only, developed out of a collective of fans who felt that their opinions and perspectives were not being taken into consideration by the rest of the Once Upon a Time fandom and the creators/actors of the program. The collective evolved into a movement, and members started to address bigger political issues about LGBTQ representation. Be that as it may, there are important similarities that make the movements compelling cases to analyze and compare. For the purposes of this research, the stark differences between the movements are rather crucial in that they clearly display how similarly hybrid identity is developed in two very different kinds of movements. The following will provide an overview of the differences and similarities of these cases.

The fundamental differences between the Occupy and Swan Queen movements stem from their respective relationships to well-regarded social movement tactics. The first and most evident difference is that Occupy involved a well-known offline component and Swan Queen did not. The Occupy Wall Street movement gained social and political legitimacy through the cultivation of offline occupations and protests throughout the country. Swan Queen, on the other hand, mobilized primarily online and within the social networks of fandoms. Though these networks have global reach, the issues that the movement pushed for did not attract mainstream political attention.
Differences in perceived legitimacy also account for another fundamental difference between the two movements. Where Occupy is widely regarded by researchers as a legitimate social movement, the Swan Queen movement is not. Fandom, in general, is not often associated with legitimate activism or social justice organization (Earl and Kimport 2009). They are known for organizing letter-writing campaigns, staging serious opposition to films or television programs, especially when there is the death of a beloved character or sudden cancelation (Jenkins 1992). The formation of a movement deviates from “normal” fan activity (Gonzalez 2017). Consequently, the Swan Queen movement struggled with the perceived legitimacy of its collective and later its movement, at every stage of development.

Many studies in social movements literature attempt to comprehensively categorize contention in order to create conceptual boundaries between what is a social movement and what is not. Yet, many researchers generally conclude that this effort is a reflection of the desire to achieve analytical clarity in the studies of social movements, more so than it is to develop tools to comprehensively account for the changes in social movement development. Polletta (2011: 475) writes, “of course, we have to draw some lines between movements and phenomena that are not movements. Conceptual boundaries serve an analytical purpose.” These boundaries allow researchers to identify parallels within movements. She provides examples of this by pointing to researchers that distinguish between movements that target the state or government and movements that have more cultural aspirations. According to Polletta (2011), the movements that do not fit within these categories are “awkward movements,” or those that do not necessarily parallel the more “paradigmatic movement” that targets the state. She considers the
implications of excluding these movements by asking: “might such movements alert us to
dynamics that operate even in the paradigmatic movements?” (Polletta 2011: 476) I
believe the answer to this question is yes. I also believe that online movements in general
may belong to this category considering that we do not have many well-established
online movements that are considered paradigms of social movement mobilization.
“Awkward movements,” like the Swan Queen movement, may be able to provide
information and insight about current and future trends in social movement development.

Furthermore, the two movements also have differing relationships to politics and research. The Occupy Wall Street movement was widely regarded as a movement with
potentially significant political implications. The most widely discussed goals of the
movement were to rectify economic imbalances and social inequality. These concerns
influenced the mainstream political discourse in the country and attracted the attention of
many people in power. The Swan Queen movement, on the other hand, received
pushback throughout the process of establishing their grievances as legitimate. This was
due to the fact that the movement's grievances were based in the romantic and
entertainment-oriented concerns of fans. The differences in perceived legitimacy are also
reflected in the amount of available research about both movements. During and in the
aftermath of the Occupy Wall Street movement, researchers thoroughly analyzed and
interrogated many aspects of the movement from its tactics, successes, failures, to
occupations and tweets. The Swan Queen movement has not been included in studies of
social movements and is mainly discussed in studies of fandoms.

Despite the clear differences between the social and cultural spheres of these
movements, both exhibit signs of being a similar type of movement, especially when
considering their online mobilizations. This is most evident in the organizational structures of the movements. According to researchers, the Occupy Wall Street movement was not a typical social movement because it openly “embraced participatory democracy and pre-figurative politics,” (Milkman 2014: 55), which meant that discursive processes were fundamental in the development of the movement (Kavada 2015). Until that point, many movements established hierarchical organization structures in order to facilitate decision-making and planning. The discursive nature of the Occupy Movement offline and online, meant that decision-making and planning often took a back seat to activist expression. This was especially evident in the mobilization efforts that took place online where collective identity became the result of a more collaborative and dynamic process, instead of being primarily issue oriented (Kavada 2015). The Swan Queen movement can also be categorized as a participatory democracy that organizes through discursive practices. Since the movement was established in a fandom, it shared many of the features of fandoms, which are collectives that embrace participatory democracy and leaderless organizational structures (Jenkins 1992). Since, fandoms primarily organize online, social media sites have played a crucial role in maintaining the collaborative and participatory nature of fandoms. As a result, both Occupy and Swan Queen share a leaderless participatory structure that is meant to facilitate a high degree of personal agency for the individual activists involved.

In both movements, this high degree of personal agency is displayed in the posts from both movements, specifically in the discourses that these movements developed on Tumblr. Even a cursory glance at the content from the social movement discourses shows that activist engagement is highly personalized. The most common type of post
associated with the movement is one where the activists share a narrative alongside an image and hashtags. For both movements, the details of the narratives vary, yet the general content is the same. The narratives unfold abbreviated descriptions of the individual activist’s life and explanations for their connection to their respective movement. The narratives are most commonly posted alongside an image of the individual. When the images are viewed in aggregate, they give the appearance of being a digital crowd, which was one of the rationales for this tactic. The hashtags posted at the bottom of these narratives provide the viewer with frames for understanding where they fit within a movement or contentious action. For example, the majority of Occupy narratives end with the #Wearethe99% hashtag, which symbolizes that the narrative and the individual belong in that collective. The Swan Queen movement used hashtags in a similar fashion to establish belongingness in the movement and to distinguish between particular campaigns, which were associated with different hashtags (e.g. #SWEN, #BelieveinSwanQueen and #SQEndgame, to name a few). The last significant similarity is the timeline of the movements. They both formed and experienced periods of peak activity from 2011-2014.

According to the basic tenets of social movement literature, the differences between these movements would result in two substantively different online mobilizations. In fact, the differences might result in some researchers determining that the Swan Queen movement is not a movement by conventional standards. This falls along the lines of a popular argument in the literature that suggests that not all signs of activism on social media constitute social movements, and the more that collectives use this label, the more difficult it is to analyze social movements and place them in history.
Along these lines, other researchers believe that it is necessary to distinguish consumer-driven movements (like those created by fans) from politically oriented movements (like those created by activists) (Earl and Kimport 2009). However, this literature does not help to explain why the online mobilization of Occupy Wall Street is so similar to the mobilization of the Swan Queen movement. If only taking offline social movement standards into consideration, the argument will certainly be: no, the Swan Queen movement should not be considered alongside Occupy Wall Street. Looking at the online mobilization, however, forces a re-examination of those offline standards, as online both collectives appear to be distinctly mobilizing as similar movements.

In comparing these cases, I am using a diverse case strategy (Seawright and Gerring 2018). By examining one movement with offline protest and one without, I can better address some of the tension in social movement literature regarding the relationship between offline and online social movements. This comparative analysis will enable me to identify if online components of mobilization vary depending on the extent of offline mobilization. *I argue that the discursive strategies and tactics of the movements are similar regardless of the offline component, and that online mobilization is governed by the translated strategies that I observe, as opposed to being a reflection of or reliant upon recognizable social movements. These strategies result in the creation of hybrid social movement identities composed of identity markers, images and narratives, all of which build upon who the activists are and what the movement is about.* This research suggests that the movements are both representatives of attempts to transition social movement strategies into digital space. The modes of organization and representation display that the movements had similar motivations and similar challenges in establishing
collective identity and the legitimacy of the activists who took part, hence the
development of hybrid identity.

The developments in social movements significantly outpace any attempt to
grapple with the ways that they are changing and developing in real time. As a result, the
movements discussed throughout this dissertation can be considered a retrospective
assessment of a specific cycle of contention that took place from 2011 – 2014. This
retrospective glance will provide significant insight into a period of transition in the
evolution of social movements that mainly went unexamined in favor of the offline
contentious developments and the online developments that were occurring on the more
mainstream social media sites. These findings will push researchers to reexamine how a
social movement is defined and the role that collective identity plays in social movement
development.

Field Site: Tumblr, Micro-blogs and Activism

When it comes to analyzing online activism, researchers most often focus on
Facebook and Twitter (for examples see: Gaby and Caren 2012; Warren et al. 2014;
Penney, Joel and Dadas 2014; Theochris et al. 2014; Ciszek 2016; Drueke and Zobl
2016; Oz 2016, Papa 2017). However, there are a wide variety of social media websites,
and each allows for different types of affordances. An affordance, according to Earl and
Kimport (2011: 10), is a “type of action or characteristic that a technology enables
through its design.” In other words, the design of the website affects how you post, what
you post and whom it reaches. Therefore, people will use social media sites in different
ways, for different purposes and to connect with different social networks.
Findings about how social movements use Facebook and Twitter, then, do not encompass the full spectrum of affordances that social media sites provide. The social media site Tumblr provides affordances that allow for the development of different kinds of activist tools and lead to different kinds of social movement organizations. Tumblr is evolving into a locus for the social justice concerns of younger generations (Safronova 2014; Lowery 2017) and as a result, more social movements have started to gravitate to the site. Journalist Wesley Lowery (2017) interviewed Opal Tometi, one of the leaders of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement, about their social media use and wrote:

The decision by Tometi to focus on Twitter and Tumblr, instead of Facebook, proved a stroke of genius. Both networks allow for more organic, democratic growth. Unlike Facebook, where algorithms determine virality, visibility on Twitter and Tumblr is determined directly by how compelling a given message, post or dispatch is.

The medium of Tumblr, therefore, plays to the sensibilities of the younger generations who prioritize equality over hierarchy and who prefer that their ideas be recognized for their import and impact without the influence of third party (or algorithm) to filter content. Posts on Tumblr take the form of micro-blogs. In this form, people can post about a wide variety of topics in whatever amount of detail they like. This platform also enables users to include images, videos, and links to other sites. Unlike Facebook, which connects people through social network connections, Tumblr connects people through #hashtags. The hashtags generally represent topics and interests. As a result, the connections on Tumblr develop due to shared interests, not pre-existing ties. Throughout the discourses of the movements, many activists comment on the shared interests that

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3 In 2018, sexual content was banned from Tumblr. Many users viewed this as a form of sexual censorship and changed the way they use the site (Sands 2018). This change in general may impact how and what kinds of movements develop on Tumblr.
brought the collective together. They describe it as a more genuine form of collective organization based on the personality of the individual more so than how individuals may know each other.

In general, the research on Tumblr is limited despite increasing evidence that activists (and other types of users – from casual to heavy) see Tumblr as a space where they can build organic communities of interest. Those who have studied Tumblr in some capacity often discuss it as being a digital archive. Jeff Juris (2012) notes that the collection of material related to diverse topics (which he describes as Tumblr’s aggregation function), is Tumblr’s most valuable and primary use. Though accurate, this conclusion ignores the community building that occurs around the development of digital discourses (Chayko 2008; Baym 2010).

**Contributions and Significance**

We are experiencing a transitional period in social movement development. This dissertation explores the dynamics of that transition. My work will aid social movements scholars in fully examining aspects of online mobilization. Activists are engaging with social movements in a far more personal manner that deviates from the collective identity expectations set by conventional offline social movements. Consequently, researchers looking for collective identity are coming up short, simply because they are not familiar with the signs and symbols of collective identity online. Additionally, researchers looking for collective identity miss out on the other identity practices involved in online mobilization. Stephensen (2017) advocates that there is a need for additional studies that investigate the possibility of collective identity formation online. She suggests that the studies needed to fill this gap in the literature are those that focus on specific cases of
activism that fall along “the intersections of media activism with other social justice struggles.” Therefore, this dissertation is an answer to this call and an attempt to create new methods of identifying and analyzing social movements.

According to Kavada (2016: 10), these new methods need to account for the fact that newer social movements have more processual and discursive purposes, where “the constitution of the movements as a political actor can, in itself, be a political outcome.” Therefore, analysis of newer social movements must intentionally deviate from both conventional standards of what a social movement is and standards that dictate whether or not the movement is successful. The achievement of political objectives must not be the primary form of success. If the development of a movement aimed to commit political action were the measure of a movement, there would be many more collectives deemed worthy of analysis and consideration. In general, new collectives and new movements are displaying the desire to establish a “new notion of political community as an ensemble of discursive practices...bound by thin ties of political solidarity linked to transformative capacities of the movement rather than thick ties of social solidarity” (Jensen and Bang 2013: 444).

The new notion of political community that they are forging requires a different conceptualization of discursive practices. Instead of being treated as primarily symbolic or cultural then, discursive practices should be taken as a form of action or mobilization. I take this approach in my analysis of the discourses from the Occupy and Swan Queen movements. I consider their online discourses to be constitutive of their repertoires of contention. One way I will do this is by treating posts as a form of mobilization and analyzing them holistically, which means including the visual content in the analysis of
the discursive content. This is a newer convention in social movements research. I believe that neglecting the visual components in the analysis limits any observations or conclusions made about online discourses.

Another significant contribution of this research is that I am further contextualizing the changing relationship between social movements and social media. Asenbaum (2018) believes that a more productive way of thinking about online activism is as “cyborg activism.” The use of the word “cyborg” is meant to reflect the literal physical connection that people have to their digital devices and the significant blurring of the boundaries between online and offline life. This framework posits that online activism reconfigures aspects of the material body online. Therefore, the connection between individuals and the technologies that they use daily eliminates many of the boundaries between offline and online. New movements are reflecting the elimination of these boundaries and regarding their actions online as intimately tied to their offline existence. Though I will not be addressing the specific technologies that individuals are using to post content, I will be examining the content as source of information that reflects both the offline and online identity of the individual. My own contribution to this field is to think about the ways in which online posts serve as a hybrid form of offline and online action.

Lastly, the discourses of the movements analyzed throughout this dissertation suggest that online activity is essential in a variety of ways, one of the most compelling being displays and development of identity, both personal and collective. I will address concerns about the personalization of activism by examining the ways that it is tied to collective identity and therefore, hybrid identity practices. Manuel Castells (2012) urges
further investigation of the extent to which people are personalizing their experiences of social movements. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) make similar claims in their discussion of connective action. They feel that a reluctance to make a distinction between collective action and connective action results in a lack of comprehensive research on movements that are motivated by personal concerns and communicate predominantly online. I, however, believe that such distinctions are no longer useful. Online social movements are manufacturing content and identities online in such a way where any aspect of collective or connective action involves both personal and collective identity. I argue that the creation of hybrid identity online is the end result of a carefully curated and manufactured body of content that reflects both the personal and collective identities of the activists. The manufactured content in the discourses is found in the identity markers, images and narratives of the activists and they contain the essential aspects of social movement mobilization online.

Dissertation Overview

The identity markers, images and narratives of the activists will each be addressed in separate chapters throughout the dissertation. In the conclusion, I will address the relationship between these three aspects of hybrid identity and the potential they have as a new social movement paradigm.

In chapter two, I provide an overview of the two case studies compared throughout this dissertation. Then, chapter three focuses on the identity markers of the movements. The discourses of the movements reveal that there are three primary layers of identity that are presented together in order to produce an activist post. In these posts, the personal identity and collective identities are both present. This finding forces a re-
examination of past social movement research and theories that suggest that the more personal content in contentious discourse, the less collective it is and therefore, the less it serves as a legitimate form of activism. Where it was once accurate to conclude that the personal is political, it may now be necessary to conclude that the personal is collective or the collective is personal. The movements display this in their discourse through the navigation of various layers of identity: (1) the personal, (2) the collective and (3) the hashtag.

In chapter four, I reconsider the role that visuals play in social movements. I analyze the images that activists post alongside their narratives. The notion that protests have to be offline in order to bring about social change suggests that the boundary that demarcates offline and online mobilization lays between what is visible (offline) and what is widely believed to be invisible (online). However, online protest involves the extensive use of visuals, many of which are a reflection of the individual and their relationship to protest. Analysis of the visual aspect of the movements reveals that collective identity also develops through representation and embodiment in images of social protest. The dominant visual themes throughout these discourse are (1) avatars, (2) partial selfies and (3) selfies. The various styles of representation are reflective of different degrees of connection to the hybrid identity of the movement.

In chapter five, I analyze the narratives of the movements and the dominant themes that are present throughout these narratives. I argue that the role of storytelling and stories in social movements is evolving. In studying the narratives of these two movements, I identify the narrative patterns that emerge in contentious storytelling and how participants negotiate their own story in and amongst dominant problematic
“metanarratives.” The response to these metanarratives has prompted the development of an alternative of “anti-story,” that serves as a platform where participants can reveal the constraints of the metanarratives they are contesting. These narratives detail the conflictual issues the social movements address.

In the conclusion, I will address how these aspects of hybrid identity are connected. Each aspect of identity discussed throughout this dissertation differs from how social movements researchers have been instructed to look for signs and symbols of identity. Communication and technology literature also has limited utility when thinking about the development and analysis of activist discourses. I propose that together, identity markers, images and narratives need to be re-conceptualized as significant indicators of activism and social movement organization. I will also address how the affordances of Tumblr serve as mechanisms that allow for different kinds of identity development. Lastly, I propose some promising avenues for future research.

The appendix will provide an overview of the methods used to conduct this study. I began my analysis by familiarizing myself with the norms and conventions of Tumblr. I then accessed public posts through the search engine and collected those that matched the following hashtags: #occupywallstreet, #Wearethe99%, #swanqueen, and #BelieveinSwanQueen. I constructed a sample through systematic random sampling. I collected every fourth post, I then pared down the sample even further by eliminating repeat posts, posts that had little to do with the subject (due to hashtag contamination) and posts unaccompanied by writing. In the end, I was left with 1,684 unique posts for Occupy and 863 unique posts for Swan Queen. For more details about the research methods, see the Appendix.
Chapter 2: The Occupy and Swan Queen Movements: An Overview

The Occupy Wall Street and the Swan Queen movement both took place during a significant period of transition in social movement development. The wave of contention that occurred from 2011-2014 was accompanied by a significant uptick in both social and political upheaval and the use of digital technologies for social movement purposes. In fact, Time magazine’s person of the year in 2011 was the protester (Anderson 2011). This was because this year featured “convulsive events in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Syria and Yemen,” “mass protests against economic breakdown and austerity in Greece, Italy and Spain,” “marches and protest camps in Chile and Israel” and “the arrival of Occupy Wall Street” (Harris 2011). Images and videos of protesters from each of these events were featured on countless newspapers and news channels, making the protesters iconic figures. It appeared that protest was a popular, if not typical, form of collective behavior in this cultural moment. One of the more notable aspects of this period’s protester was the fact that they were digitally savvy and therefore, capable of organizing networked protests. Here the word networked refers to the “reconfiguration of movements and publics through the incorporation of digital technologies and connectivity” (Tufekci 2017). Therefore, the use of digital technology was not only aiding the organization of protests and social movements, it was also reconstructing the events and movements in unexpected ways.

Mason (2011) observed that all of the protest events were similar in this respect; they incorporated digital technologies into their mobilization practices and appealed to those in the community who had begun to rely on those technologies throughout their day-to-day lives. He also observed that despite the increased interest in digital
technologies, those reporting on the events and researching them largely misunderstood the significance of the protesters’ use of technology. He claims that people typically focused how the technology was used to communicate with others in their networks. This focus overshadowed the fact that large disaffected populations were using a wide range of social media “so they can express themselves in a variety of situations ranging from parliamentary democracy to tyranny…Technology has-in many ways, from the contraceptive pill to the iPod, the blog and the CCTV camera-expanded the space and power of the individual” (Mason 2011). This suggests that members of this society who use social media are acting with more agency in advocating for themselves and their interests. The technologies mentioned are used to fight a wide range of social injustices, meaning that the technologies remove many of the limitations that were previously placed on which social justice issues were thought to be worth pursuing (Leizerov 2000).

The movements discussed throughout this dissertation are two other examples of protesters attempting to re-claim both power and identity through the use of digital tools. Despite the differences in these movements’ social contexts and relationships to offline mobilization, the activists from both movements exhibit the sense that their movements will bring about change and hope for others.

The first movement discussed throughout this dissertation is the Occupy Movement, which according to Castells (2012) is not just a series of networked protests, but it should be considered a “networked social movement.” According to his definition of networked movements, it is a movement that involves both offline and online mobilizations (Castells 2012). The protesters primary goal is to organize offline mobilization but the way in which they do this is by contacting their online networks. As
this dissertation will show, the online content of the movement was not solely geared towards the organization of offline mobilization. Therefore, Castells concept is useful in that it proposes a significant link between offline and online mobilization, yet it incorrectly assumes that the online mobilization is not significant in and off itself. Still, for movements like Occupy it is imperative to consider the relationship between the offline and online mobilization. Consequently, though the focus of this research is on the online component of the movement, the offline will also be discussed in order to further contextualize how the movement developed and the relationship between the online and offline components. An overview of the Swan Queen movement will follow. This overview is going to include a discussion of fandom in addition to the movement itself, as the social networks of the movement derive from networks that were already established through both online and offline fan networks. A cursory understanding of the dynamics of fandom is necessary to understand the development of the movement. In both case descriptions, I will provide an overview of how the movements propagated bodies of posts and narratives similar to the examples above.

**The Occupy Wall Street Movement**

The origins of the Occupy Wall Street Movement have been the subject of some debate. There are those who say that it started with the efforts of a number of activists, both local and international, who saw the need for a general assembly style protest in New York City, while others attribute the start of the movement to *Adbusters*, a Canadian anti-capitalist magazine (Kroll 2011). According to many of the participants, the first sign of this movement was the online advertisement or “rallying cry” created by *Adbusters*, which invited people to take part in a “Day of Rage” on September 17, 2011 (Figure 1).
The message of the advertisement challenged people to seize their “Tahrir moment,” which is a reference to a protest event in January 2011 where over 50,000 people occupied a public square in Egypt. The proposed target of the movement was Wall Street as it is largely considered to be the focal point of economic problems and income inequality. There were several advertisements to follow, but this initial advertisement started a chain reaction or, as Adbusters editor Michael White put it, things just “snowballed from there” (Fleming 2011). Those who found the advertisements compelling flocked to Wall Street on a Saturday morning. Then, the growing number of people gravitating to the movement gave a number of local and international activists the opportunity they were looking for to create a general assembly in public space by activating their existing activist networks (Kroll 2011; Milkman, Luce and Lewis 2013). Therefore, the mixed origins of the movement led to a population of activists who became aware of the movement through both online and offline channels.

The initial Day of Rage took place on a Saturday and the protesters quickly realized that the occupation of Wall Street on a Saturday would do very little to disrupt business as usual. What followed was a series of decisions that led the collective to move to nearby Zuccotti Park, a privately owned but public open space. There, the protesters built an encampment that would last for almost two months.\(^4\) In this “occupation,”

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\(^4\) I frequently visited the Zuccotti Park encampment during its 2-month occupation. Walking through the park on any given day was like stumbling through an over-crowded sleepover. Tents, blankets, sheets, sleeping bags, and tarps covered the ground, leaving only the hints of good walking trails. Other areas of the park were cordoned off and dedicated to providing the Occupiers with some community comforts. People took shifts in the kitchen to distribute food and clean up afterward. Others dedicated their time to managing an ever-growing library, and still, others worked to generate enough power on stationary bikes so that people could charge phones and computers. Countless individuals appeared on the outskirts of the park curious about the cause, the protesters and what the movement would do next. The occupation was ultimately evicted from the park by New York City police officers on November 15th. (Based on ethnographic data collected in 2011)
protesters slept, prepared meals, discussed tactics and political issues, met with the press and organized additional protests. The occupation tactic was derived from the “sit-down” strikes and sit-ins of past social movements. The establishment of the occupation was viewed as a highly contentious act for several reasons, the first being that the park that they occupied was privately owned. The owners of the park notified the police on several occasions and police officers attempted to remove individuals from the grounds due to perceived violations of health and safety codes (Shapiro and Strachan 2011). The occupation was also contentious because, as Moore (2013: 6) writes “occupations differ from other forms of protest like marches and rallies primarily in their temporal and spatial persistence, and in this sense they allow for more of an explicit meditation on the role of the persisting, protesting body” (Moore 2013: 6). In other words, people could not forget that the protest existed. Other kinds of social movements involve periods of downtime where the movement plans its next event out of the public eye. Occupy’s planning stages, however, occurred right in the open for both the public and their corporate targets to see. Furthermore, the persisting protesting body took the form of a community that openly defied many of the treasured tenets of contemporary capitalist society. Therefore, the occupation served as an enduring reminder of the movement and its grievances.

Within the occupation space, the occupiers strived to prefigure the kind of community they would want to live in, one with far more equitable resources. This

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5 In “The Occupied Wall Street Journal,” (the publication circulated by the movement, will be referred to as OWSJ) activists establish a link between them and movements from the past. They claim that occupiers “have created a unique opportunity to peacefully shift the tides of history like the sit-down strikes of the 1930s, the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the democratic uprisings across the Arab world and Europe today” (Gupta 2011).
emphasis on equality and inclusiveness informed the overall organizing structure of the movement. There was not one leader, but many and decisions were made through an elaborate collaborative process. Final decisions were arrived at through the achievement of consensus. Those decisions that lacked consensus would be dismissed or tabled for another time. In theory, this formation would prefigure the kind of community that could exist if the institutional structure of the United States were to be more equal. However, there were some that felt that this form of organization was better in theory than in practice. As one activist observed, the movement frequently advocated that everyone in the movement should have a voice, but the desire for decisiveness “put a premium on solidarity and discretion,” which in turn discouraged “an open airing of doubts and disagreements” (Miller 2012: 178).

In other words, many people supported decisions in the movement more so for efficiency and solidarity purposes than for the fact that those decisions align with their understanding of the movement and its goals. For example, one young woman wrote about the night when she heard the Declaration of the movement read out loud to the General Assembly, and she had to decide between halting the progress they made by insisting upon a revision or going along with a statement that went against her beliefs, she writes:

The night before, I’d heard the Declaration read aloud at the General Assembly…the line that hit me in the stomach [was]: “As one people, formerly divided by the color of our skin, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or lack thereof, political party and cultural background…” The proposed text ignored people from countries that have been colonized and communities right here where democratic participation is anything but a given…After the assembly concluded, I spoke with some of the men who had written the document. Let me tell you what

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6 On several occasions, the occupiers collectively decided to engage in fairly risky behavior (that which would certainly qualify as WUNC displays, as defined by Tilly). They decided to maintain the occupied sites despite severe pushback from the police and various attempts to evacuate the spaces. They also attempted to stop traffic on the Brooklyn Bridge on October 1, 2011. The protest ended with over 700 arrests and drew even more national and worldwide attention to their cause.
it feels like as a woman of color to stand in front of a white man and explain privilege to him. It hurts. It makes you tired. Sometimes it makes you want to cry. (Maharawal, 2011)

This woman feels that by denying the existence of some social issues in the occupations, that the movement is falsely representing the level of diversity and inclusion it has achieved and further perpetuates the kind of society where divisions according to race, sex and sexual orientation are ignored for the good of the many. It is also putting a strain on those who are forced to make the choice between representing the collective and representing themselves and their truth. This suggests that despite the intentions to prefigure the kind of society where this does not occur, the dynamics at the Occupy Wall Street site reified societal divisiveness. Mainstream media critiqued the movement for this apparent divisiveness and the appearance of the movement in general. For instance, one article in The New York Times noted that the movement appeared to be more akin to a “carnival” than a genuine social movement (Bellafonte 2011). The article later goes on to state “the group’s lack of cohesion and its apparent wish to pantomime progressivism rather than practice it knowledgeably is unsettling in the face of the challenges so many of its generation face” (Bellafonte 2011). This critique essentially downgraded Occupy from a movement to a spectacle. It calls into question the ability of the movement to act despite its use of a tactic that is considered “high-cost” and “high-risk.”

The divisiveness of the Occupy collective was also reflected in the proposed goals of the movement. The goals did not entirely reflect the symbolic heart of the movement, which was the profound income inequality between those in the wealthy 1% and the rest

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7 The occupation as a form of protest fits the model of "high-cost" and "high-risk" activism put forth by Doug McAdam (1986). In terms of cost, occupation required a lot of time and energy. It is also "high-risk" since the protesters' often put their safety on the line when staying in the park and when protesting.
of the 99%. Many other grievances and potential goals for the movement were proposed, which resulted in a list that the movement put forth in *The Occupied Wall Street Journal* (Figure 2). Some examples of the goals of the movement are: “ending capital punishment, ending wealth inequity, ending police intimidation, ending corporate censorship, ending modern profiteering, ending American imperialism and ending war” (OccupyWallSt.org 2011). As seen here, when the goals of the movement do reflect economic concerns it is done so in a way that is geared towards broad societal changes as opposed to concrete policies that could alleviate the economic strain of the 99%. The inclusion of these other overarching goals made the movement appear to be more ideological than practical. For many, the ideological nature of the movement hindered the progress of the offline mobilization, because it made it very difficult to generate any genuine solidarity among the protesters (Herbert 2013). The result of the apparent lack of clear goals and solidarity coupled with “no new leaders, no legislative victories or political change of any kind” led some to conclude that Occupy was more of a cultural moment than a movement (Herbert 2013).

However, this conclusion was generally extended to the offline component of the movement, but taking part in the “high-risk” offline component of the movement was not the only way that people contributed to the movement, its goals and its discourse. Frankly, participating in this “high-risk” component of the movement was not an option for many people. This is reflected in the demographics of the movement. A study found that about two-thirds of the population who protested on Wall Street was white and 80% had at least a bachelor’s degree (Milkman, Luce and Lewis 2013). This demographic was described as “having sufficient time and energy to become activists because they were
unconstrained by highly demanding family or work commitments” (Milkman, Luce and Lewis 2013: 13). For those who did not have sufficient time and energy participating in occupation was prohibitive. There are still costs associated with online activity that make it difficult for some to participate (Schradie 2018), but overall the barriers of participation are much lower online and there is less need to incentivize participation compared to offline protest organization (Elliott and Earl 2018). These lowered barriers meant that the movement online reflected a different demographic, which result in different forms of collective action, collective identity practices and goal development. One of the symbols widely associated with collective identity development of this movement was the 99% and it is this symbol that is connected to the development of an online discourse on Tumblr.

**The 99%**

The symbol of the 99% is one of the most lasting and recognizable symbols of the movement. It represents the vast wealth inequality that exists throughout the United States, where the majority of the nation’s wealth is concentrated in the hands of the 1%, while the other 99% make do with splitting a much smaller portion. According to Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich (2012: 301), the 99% is made up of “most ‘ordinary’ rich people, along with middle-class professionals, factory workers, truck drivers, and miners, as well as the much poorer people who clean houses, manicure the fingernails, and maintain the lawns of the affluent.” In other words, these are individuals that do not have much in common beyond being human and being a part of this significant portion of the population, the 99%. When analyzing the movement, it is necessary to distinguish between the economic identity of the 99% (as in the identity based on financial status)
and the cultural identity that developed as a result of the movement. This distinction is important when considering the differences between the physical sites of protest and the online sites of protest.

Many online sites were used to organize the online protest component of Occupy Wall Street. Studies of Occupy’s use of social media suggest that the activists primarily relied on Facebook (Gaby and Caren 2012) and Twitter (Penney, Joel and Dadas 2014; Theochris et al. 2014). However, the movement also used the social media site Tumblr. In studies of Occupy, Tumblr will often receive a cursory reference as the social media platform where the #Wearethe99% blog started (Gamson and Sifry 2013). This blog is described as a “popular hub for collecting, sharing and spreading personal stories of economic deprivation and struggle” (Gamson and Sifry 2013: 160). However, the content of the stories is rarely examined. This ignores how the site was used for community building, activist engagement and the development of the online strategies of contention.

The “We are the 99%” blog originated on Tumblr in 2011 and was dedicated to the collection of stories of the “99%” (Weinstein 2011). At first, it was thought that Tumblr served aggregation purposes only (Juris 2012). Tumblr, as a medium, however, allowed for much more than just the sharing of content and became both a repository of contention and a network of collective actors mobilizing in distinct ways online. Pricilla Grim, co-editor of the Tumblr blog, set the tone for these stories in her initial post, which featured a picture of her with her face partially covered by a piece of paper with a handwritten story. Doing it this way, she said, was the best way to share her story and “anonymize” herself at the same time. She wanted herself and all of the people that posted after her to appear to be “one of the many” (Weinstein 2011). After the blog went
live on September 8, 2011, it started to attract a lot of attention from activists, the mainstream media and many people in the public (Taussig 2015). According to the co-editors of the blog, anyone could post a story, the only directive being that the stories “must be concise” (Weinstein 2011). An example of such a post can be seen in Figure 3; this individual is sharing a truncated narrative of their status, their grievances and their desire to identify as a member of the 99%. In this particular case, the individual’s grievances are linked to concerns about others who appear to be suffering more. Still, in order to make this claim, they shared details about themselves and their personal life. This is a common theme throughout the discourse of the movement.

After the eviction of the Zuccotti Park occupation on November 15th, 2011, other occupations were similarly evicted. From that point, the most reliable and consistent means of communication with other people in the movement was the Internet. As such, the “We are the 99%” Tumblr blog persisted beyond the movement and remains a repository of this period of contentious engagement. Tumblr is also the chosen base of operations for other online social movements as is the case with the second social movement discussed throughout this dissertation: The Swan Queen Movement.

The Swan Queen Movement

Unlike the Occupy Wall Street Movement, the origins of the Swan Queen movement are well-known within the community and fairly well-documented, what was unclear to some was how the Swan Queen collective evolved from a collective of fans into a movement (Gonzalez 2016). This movement traces its origins back to a contentious issue experienced by the fandom of the television program Once Upon a Time. Most contentious issues in fandom tend to work themselves out over time, for in fighting is
fairly common within fandom communities (Jenkins 1992; Hills 2012). This contentious issue, however, lead not just to in fighting, but to a community of fans committed to social justice issues related to the “Swan Queen ship,” above and beyond their allegiance to the program that inspired the fandom. The “ship” is a familiar term and concept within fandom circles. When you “ship” a couple, it means that you are a fan of not just the individuals but also the relationship. Shipping practices in fandom extend beyond the realm of characters in entertainment, as fans can ship both fictional characters and nonfictional individuals, as in celebrities. In the specific case of the Swan Queen ship, “shipping” is when members of the fandom support the romantic pairing of two characters in the television show, whether or not this relationship is canon (part of the original plot of the program) (Jenkins 1992; Ng 2008; Tosenberger 2008; and Larsen 2013). Therefore, the relationship does not need to exist within the source material of the program as created by the writers, producers, and actors.

The relationship that the Swan Queen ship was based on did not exist in canon, which under normal “shipping” circumstances would not be problematic. However, the supporters of this ship received significant pushback from other members of their own fandom and other fandoms. The Swan Queen ship pairs the characters Emma Swan (the hero) with Regina Mills (the villain). The canon narrative pits these two characters against each other. Emma Swan is the biological mother of Regina’s adopted son and at the same time is the savior that is meant to break the Evil Queen Regina’s curse. This multi-layered narrative creates tension between these two characters. Swan Queen fans interpret the subtext of this narrative as a story filled with potential romance. The battle between these two powerful women and their profound love for their son will eventually
result in a profound love of each other. Fans use scenes from the canon program as proof to support their interpretation (Figures 5 and 6).

As more fans joined the Swan Queen ship, the collective produced images and narratives related to this couple en masse. The narratives serve as a form of fan fiction or stories created with the use of pre-existing fictional characters. The accumulation of compelling narratives led Swan Queen fans to wonder if the creators would ever include LGBTQ characters, Swan Queen or otherwise. One of the first answers to this curiosity came in an interview. When asked if LGBTQ characters were to be included in canon, creators, Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz, responded, “We are absolutely open to it. For us, it is a matter of the right time and the right story, and it’s something we discuss. It’s something we’re very open to” (Whitney 2013). The Swan Queen community took this as a nod to their efforts, yet it was still considered a paltry response to the types of inclusion that the fans were demanding. In an open letter to the creators of the show, one blogger wrote:

> When you switch on the television today, there’s about a handful of LGBTQ* characters. Most of them are white cisgendered [normal] gay boys. Most of the others look and act exactly like cisgendered [normal] heterosexual people—most female queers don’t even get to say the words “I am lesbian/bisexual/asexual/trans*/queer* out loud”… I need Mulan, and my other childhood heroes, to be like me. (relax-o-vision 2013)

This blogger suggests that the need for LGBTQ characters in this television show goes beyond the purpose of diversity and representation, in that it can potentially significantly impact those LGBTQ individuals who are watching the program. Seeing characters “like them” can signify acceptance and legitimacy of LGBTQ experiences. This is a theme present throughout the discourse.

This letter and other attempts to communicate with the creators of the program represent a new stage in the evolution of the “fan” and the amount of agency they believe
they have over the content associated with their fandom. In her analysis of the influence of Internet technology on fan interaction and “tele-participation,” Sharon Ross (2008: 254) concludes that the growth of this technology has "stimulated a likely already-present desire among viewers to participate to a larger degree in the experience of storytelling—whether by influencing narrative decisions, or by understanding the process of creation more fully, or by sharing thoughts and feelings with both creative professionals and fellow TV viewers." According to this observation, fans do not just want the ability to communicate with others about their interpretations, but they want their interpretations respected and accounted for by creators and other fans. These expectations prove to be a double-edged sword for fan interactions because the freedom to openly communicate about their interpretations inadvertently led to contention within the fandom.

Attempts to communicate with the program’s creators about Swan Queen resulted in backlash from other fans of the program. The following are some examples of the pushback that Swan Queen received due to the homosexual nature of its preferred ship:

Fuck you all for trying to shove this ship down everyone’s throats. (neg_comment 1, figure 4)

The swanqueeners need to be put down. Its gross. It is never going to fucking happen. they are embarassing themselves and the rest of the fandom they need to have a lid put on it. (neg_comment 2, figure 5)

In defense of Adam after he was sent the tweet: “You can’t pretend it just doesn’t exist. So please. Adam just tell me WHY SwanQueen is being overlooked,” another fan responded “Because they’re BOTH straight and normal. And it DOESN’T exist, he’s not pretending. Stop sending hate to him. (neg_comment 3, figure 6)

Another tweet directed at Adam Horowitz: “Can you tell those idiotic lesbians that Regina and Emma are straight please? They need to stop bothering u and everyone else.” (neg_comment 4, figure 7)

These comments reveal two critical themes in fan shaming, both having to do with the nature of legitimacy. The first theme concerns the context of the show itself. The
comments critique the desire for Swan Queen to be recognized and accepted, implying that it should be dismissed and ignored. The second and third quotes attempt to further deny Swan Queen by maintaining that it is “gross” and never going to happen because the characters are “straight and normal.”

The comments display that the norms that structure fan-shipping practices are hierarchical and heteronormative; they are determined by those who have power over the text more so than those who are actively engaging with and interpreting the text. These norms push against the desire for fans to freely express their creative inclinations, especially when it comes to the gender identity and sexuality of fictional characters (which is more a popular tenant of literary criticism than it is television criticism) (Gymnich 2010). In essence, it appears that the critique of these fans is that the Swan Queen shippers may be taking the program and their shipping practices too seriously. They are imposing the complications with gender and sexuality that exist in the offline world on the online and entertainment world. Another theme exhibited in these comments is that the fans are not just calling into question the legitimacy of the ship but also the legitimacy of LGBTQ audience members. Additionally, these comments from fans represent attempts to regulate what subjects should or should not be broached with the writers of the show. In many ways, this establishes oppositional readings of the OUAT text as a form of “hate.”

On the other hand, there are those like Lily Sparks (tv.com) who find it comforting to know that there are people out there who have watched the program and identified the Swan Queen ship not just as a possible relationship but one that would be profoundly meaningful. She says,

When viewers say they want to see Swan Queen, it’s not a request for the show to become
sexually explicit, to be Once Upon a Time in My Pants, it’s asking the show and the show’s audience to recognize that all those idealized elements of true love—authentic connection, sacrifice, and loyalty—also happen in LGBT relationships. LGBT romances deserve an idealized, flowers and hearts, aspirational depiction that parents and kids can watch together and sigh and say “Awww!” the way they do currently with hetero ones. (Sparks 2013)

This statement is meant to combat those who feel that, as a family show that appeals mostly to younger demographics, Once Upon a Time should not have an LGBT romance occur between two of the main characters. This argument suggests that it will tamper with the wholesomeness of the program and unduly sexualize the content. However, Sparks maintains that the impact of seeing Swan Queen can significantly shape the audience’s perceptions of lesbian/homosexual romance. The comment also identifies that the underlying problem here is based in the heteronormative ideologies promoted by fairy tale plots.

Swan Queen’s fans’ hope of being legitimized by the creators and potentially influencing canon were dashed on July 20, 2013, when creators, Kitsis and Horowitz stated that any evidence or signs of a romantic connection between Emma and Regina were purely “unintentional” (Lamourex 2013; Sparks 2013). The result of this was not less but more contention as Swan Queen fans continued to pursue their interest in the Swan Queen relationship despite the increasingly unfavorable reputation that Swan Queen fans had as the program progressed. On December 22nd, 2013 a message was sent out to other Swan Queen fans from The Swan Queen Movement Tumblr page, which read:

We have so many talented and passionate people who are willing to go through hell and high water for this ship, why not take advantage of our greatness and use it to change the way the writers/creators and cast see us? Why not use our assets to make ourselves be heard? This is what the Swan Queen Movement is. Anyone can participate. The point is to create the most significant impact we can in every way possible. (SwanQueen Movement)
Swan Queen went on to organize social media campaigns to increase the visibility of their movement. Some of the tactics that they have utilized thus far are letter-writing campaigns, fan art repositories, and Twitter trends. These fans also established the #BelieveinSwanQueen campaign on Tumblr, which encourages fans to post their faces and stories similar to the posts on the “We are the 99%” Tumblr blog, where they share an abundance of personal information.

Within fandom, this tactic is particularly compelling because identity and personal information are often concealed when interacting in fan communities. The act of revealing identities or linking names to fan activity has been described as a “cardinal fannish sin” (Busse and Helleckson 2012: 39). By the standards laid out by McAdam (1986), this would qualify as low-risk activism because the time and energy needed to produce the online content are relatively low, and it does not involve any physical engagement for the activists involved. However, since this material involves the revelation of personal identities, it can be viewed as “high-risk,” for as Taylor and Raeburn (1995) argue that “the deployment of identity for the purposes of contesting stigmatized group representations and achieving institutional change is, instead, a form of high-risk political activism.” Therefore, this action is what sets the Swan Queen movement apart from the fandom it derived from. The activists are engaging in a form of high-risk political activism that defies many of the norms of online engagement that they had become accustomed to throughout their previous participation as fans. This is one of the primary examples of how Swan Queen is a movement and not just another form of contentious fan activity.
Contentious Fan Activity

“Fans have little say about what happens to their characters or their programs, but fans claim the right to protest and protest loudly decisions contradicting their perception of what is desirable or appropriate.”

Henry Jenkins (1992)

Fan activism emerged in the repertoire of fan activity during periods of friction between those who are responsible for entertainment programming and those who are fans of it. Before the advent of digital communication technologies, fans communicated with producers, writers, and actors through letter writing campaigns. Media and culture studies do not adequately account for why fans choose forms of activism over other tactics (Earl and Kimmport, 2009). Part of the reason for this is that literature on online movements tends to make a distinction between entertainment based advocacy and movements with political goals (Earl and Schussman 2003; Scardaville 2005). Earl and Kimport (2009: 222) conclude that fan activism is a distinctly non-political action because fans “forward their interests in and positions on particular cultural products outside of any standard sense of political affairs.” That is, fans are pursuing issues that have little to no large-scale political implications. This conclusion acknowledges that fan activism could be useful in challenging the actions of media corporations, but it also strips fan activism of its political implications and relegates it to the realm of “cultural production dynamics,” or to put it simply, it becomes an issue of supply and demand (Earl and Kimport, 2009: 230).

These conclusions were largely based on analysis of early fan campaigns that primarily dealt with issues of character death or the cancelation of the program. However, the growth of internet communication technologies led to the development of new and
different avenues for fan activism. The pronounced blending of offline and online changed the nature and the implications of fan activity to such an extent that Brough and Shresthova (2012) claim that “fandom and participatory entertainment cultures influence and at times reshape our understanding of civic and political mobilization.” According to their understanding of the relationship between participatory entertainment cultures and politics, what were once treated as two completely separate realms of society, must be examined together. The analysis throughout this dissertation supports this notion as the participatory entertainment and political realms appear to have overlapping concerns and now, overlapping structures. The blurred lines between fandom and politics can be seen throughout the history of fan struggles over LGBTQ representation.

Throughout the history of fandom, one issue in particular that has inspired critical engagement amongst fans is LGBTQ+ representation. Before the point when homosexual characters were on primetime television, they were present in slash fiction. Slash fiction, according to Richard Berger, (Pullen, 2010: 174) is a genre that “would subvert and make homoerotic the heterosexual relationships” depicted on television. The name for the genre came from the forward slash punctuation mark separating the two names of the characters that the fan fiction focused on. One of the first and most famous (if not infamous) cases of this is Kirk/Spock. These stories attempted to tap into the deep-seated sexual tensions that some audience members believe exist between the two characters. Fans support these beliefs and the stories that stem from them with evidence from subtext. Subtext, strictly defined, is the underlying or implicit meaning of a text and the attempt to read or interpret subtext usually generates alternative readings of the source material (Ng, 2008: 104). From subtext, fans can determine that the implicit meaning of some extended
glances, heated moments; the entering of each other’s personal space meant that characters desire or love each other.

The significance of this genre, according to Berger (Pullen 2010), lies not in the fictional characters or issues of LGBT representation, but with the individuals who are engaging in this kind of narrative development and using it as a means of experimenting with their sexual confidence and sexual identity. Others that feel similarly claim that the writing and sharing of slash fiction promote the development of queer spaces online (Tosenberger, 2008: 202; Pullen, 2010: 183). Along these lines, Collier, Lumadue and Wooten’s (2009) work found that for lesbians in the early stages of identity formation, television serves as one of, if not the only source of images of lesbians and lesbian life. Therefore, “television provides a way for individuals to see themselves represented and reflected back to them, validating their experiences. The absence of such “mirroring” of the self can lead to low self-esteem and shame, particularly within minority populations” (Collier, Lumadue, and Wooten, 2009: 578). They suggest that the desire for “mirroring” leads fans to identify lesbian characters and relationships in programs that lack them.

For example, the Xena: Warrior Princess fandom attracted the attention of many in the lesbian community, which resulted in the production of a copious amounts of fan fiction featuring the two lead characters, Xena and Gabrielle, in romantic and sexual relationships. In her interviews with fans of this show, Rosalind Hammer (Pullen, 2010: 154) remarks, “what became more palpable as the interviews continued was the fans’ desire for Xena and Gabrielle’s love/sexual relationship to be fulfilled on screen, but they also wanted their sexual/love desire to become a reality.” The fans that continued to
engage with this interpretation of the text were often thought to be disruptive and other fans felt as if this community marred the reputation of the program and the fandom.

Although there are often many “shippers” in fandoms, they frequently find themselves on the receiving end of open condemnation and hate from other fans. In her study of fan interactions, Hadas (2012: 2013) observed that shippers are generally thought to be “rabid” and unreasonable fans that test the boundaries of normal fan interaction and behavior. The reason why shippers are viewed this way is that they are believed to be more loyal to the romantic pairing than they are to the program as a whole. Other fans complain that once shippers dedicate themselves to a relationship, they talk about little else and do not spend as much time and attention on the source program. Studies show that the shipping conflicts among fans often result in boundaries that separate and exclude fans of certain ships (Bothe 2014; Gonzalez 2016). These conflicts are the result of disputes over shippers’ beliefs that their interpretation of the program is more valid than the creators. The interpretation of these disputes is that shippers are often placing their own desires above and beyond those in the collective fandom.

Shipping, therefore, is largely interpreted as an individualistic endeavor that defies the more community purposes that fandom is meant to serve, at least for those who desire fandom to be a safe space for all kinds of individuals (Hadas 2012; Tosenberger 2008). The shipping activity of the Swan Queen ship, however, was less about individual desires for the program as it was about LGBTQ+ community desires for the program. Therefore, this transition served as an evolution from individual fan practice, to collective fan practice and then to collective action. At the end of their analysis of the relationship between fandom and activism, Brough and Shresthova (2012) recommend, “future
research should consider emergent (as well as existing) modes and structures of engagement in fan activism, such as how content worlds may serve to bridge networked individualism and collective action.” The content of the Swan Queen discourse proves to be a source of answers to this question, as activists are attempting to account for their individual practices and identities while at the same time promoting the significance of and purposes of their collective.

The overviews above suggest that there are a number of possible avenues of analysis to explore in both movements. The existence of the physical body of protesters for Occupy sets it up as a significant act of protest with broader societal and political implications, however, as the overview displays, the offline component of this movement was not universally considered to be successful or even beneficial for those involved. Some individuals who took part in the offline component felt excluded from the decision-making process and did not feel that they could interfere with the decision making of the broader collective. Interestingly, this also happened within the Swan Queen movement, as Swan Queen shippers were increasingly excluded from taking part in the Once Upon a Time fandom and felt the need to distance themselves from the fandom and its decisions regarding interpretation of the program.

In both movements people looked to social media as a place where they could interact in a more genuine way with others who would welcome their thoughts and interpretations. This resulted in the creation of profiles and pages directly committed to their respective causes. The online component of the Occupy movement was well known, yet only certain aspects of the online branch of the movement were addressed in social
movements literature. The discourse developed on Tumblr was not often the focus of that analysis. This could be for many reasons; one of the most prominent being that researchers are generally unfamiliar with the site, how it is used and how the affordances of this site facilitate activist endeavors. Another possible reason is Tumblr’s association with subculture (McCracken 2017) and the organization of unconventional collectives, like fandoms. For many fans, Tumblr is the place that fans migrated to in droves around 2011-2012 (Stein 2018). The site provided an abundance of tools that allowed fans to forms communities and cultivate their fan aesthetic, as Morimoto and Stein (2018) insist, Tumblr’s “affordances and limitations-have shaped fandom uses of the site and arguably have thus shaped fandoms themselves.” This is also true of the movements that used Tumblr as site for organization and communication.

As will be seen in the examples of both movements, the affordances of Tumblr facilitated a more nuanced activist experience complete with new strategies of identity development that deviate from the collective identity practices of the larger collectives that they are associated with. Online, both movements created identities that set them apart from the larger collectives through the posting of identity markers, images and narratives that resulted in hybrid identities. The following chapter will specifically address the role that identity markers play in identity development and how personal and collective identities were developed through the activist discourses.
“Collective action cannot occur in the absence of a ‘we’ characterized by common traits and specific solidarity.”

(Della Porta and Diani 2006: 94).

The “we” referred to in this quote is the collective identity of the movement and as the authors indicate, collective identity is a requirement for collective action. Based on this claim, the conclusion can be made that collective identity is based on commonalities and a sense of connection to the movement that supersedes the “I” of any individual activist. In fact, according to Milan (2013: 68), a common trait of collective identity is the “collapsing of the “I” into the “we”, through which the individual recognizes him or herself in some sort of “we-ness” (real or imagined) that stands for collective agency.” The collapsing of the “I” into the “we” represents the displacement of personal identity within collective identity, where the latter takes precedence over the former during events integral to the mobilization of the collective.

This conception of collective identity is widely disseminated in canonical social movement texts, where researchers strongly emphasize the significance of those features that are shared and those identities that can best encapsulate activists’ sense of belonging to a social movement (Snow and McAdam 2000; Snow 2001). In this way, collective identity is interpreted as the glue that binds members of a social movement together. As analysis of the cases throughout this dissertation shows, collective identity may not serve this same purpose in online social movements, for in these types of movements, it is more likely that traits are uncommon and solidarity is less specific due to the distinct presence
of personal identities in their social movement discourses. This begs the question, what role does collective identity play in online social movements? If collective identity is not the glue, what are the ties that bind online social movements?

This chapter addresses these questions. Analysis of recent social movements suggests that movements are developing collective identities, but that these identities come in forms that differ from those of conventional offline social movements. In conventional offline movements, collective identity frequently comes in the form of a “public pronouncement of status” (Friedman and McAdam 1992: 157). In this form, collective identity is first and foremost a declaration of purpose meant for the public. Therefore, it must come in a form that the public can perceive, interpret and identify without equivocation. In contrast, more recent movements appear to be placing less significance and less developmental energy on the construction of this form of collective identity, which leads researchers to conclude that collective identity is not as integral in online mobilization as it is in offline mobilization (Milan 2015). Some researchers go so far as to suggest that collective identity no longer has utility as a concept when analyzing current social movements (McDonald 2002; Bennett and Segerberg 2013). These studies serve as examples of researchers’ attempts to adjust for the significance or lack thereof of collective identity in online social movements; however, their arguments go too far in the other direction. These studies establish a binary, where a movement either has a collective identity or it does not and few alternatives are proposed. Analysis of the cases below confirms that activists are engaging in more personalized forms of activism (Bennett and Segerberg 2012), but also displays that collective identity is present in the discourses as well.
As seen in the literature discussed here and in the introduction, researchers arrive at inconsistent conclusions regarding the relationship between personal identity and collective identity. There are scholars who insist that there should be clear distinctions made between the two types of identity (Polletta and Jasper 2001). Polletta and Jasper (2001) suggest that the utility of collective identity as a concept can be salvaged if clear distinctions are made between what constitutes collective identity and what does not. Collective identity, they write, is “fluid and relational, emerging out of interactions with a number of different audiences (bystanders, allies, opponents, news media, state authorities), rather than fixed” (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 298). Their conception of collective identity posits that it is something that emerges over time through interactions that shift and redefine the identity. According to this definition, the redefining of collective identity is a process influenced more so by the interpretations of external audiences than the interpretations of those within the movement. Therefore, fluidity is encouraged, but is primarily geared towards change for the purposes of increasing external appeal. This emphasis upon fluidity, however, does not extend to their discussion of personal politics. In fact, they assert that collective identity is not and should not be conflated with personal identity. They write, “if collective identity describes what makes people occupying a category similar, personal identity is the bundle of traits that we believe make us unique” (Polletta and Jasper 2001). The connotation here is that too much fluidity or perhaps uniqueness of the individuals, make it difficult to establish common ground between the activists.

Fominaya (2010), on the other hand, deplores the tendency to insist upon the division between personal and collective and concludes that this divide should be
bypassed in order to produce more comprehensive studies of collective identity. To
bypass this divide, she suggests using the “product definition” and the “process
definition” of collective identity. Most social movement researchers approach collective
identity from a “product definition” orientation, which means that they are focused on
perceptions of “shared attributes, goals, and interests,” which are those aspects of identity
packaged and framed for public consumption. The “process definition,” on the other
hand, addresses collective identity as “shared meanings, experiences, and reciprocal
emotional ties,” which is the identity work that takes place internally within the
movement and between activists (Fominaya 2010: 397). The latter definition of collective
identity is largely determined in those settings that the public does not have access to. She
advocates, “more empirical work needs to be carried out to understand the nexus between
individual feelings of belonging, commitment, and identification, and group, network,
movement, and solidarity collective identities” (Fominaya 2010: 401). Fominaya
considers collective identity development as layers of product and process. This
conception of collective identity lends itself to analysis of online social movements
because, as I discuss throughout this chapter, online social movements also develop
through the manufacturing of layers of identity.

I use Fominaya’s constructs as a framework for coding and analyzing identity
markers in the Occupy Wall Street and Swan Queen discourses. From my analysis, I have
found that the identity markers within these discourses are often layered, as Fominaya
suggests, and therefore, they do not easily conform to binary structures, like divisions of
collective and personal identity. The layers of identity are not clear and distinct; rather,
single posts generally contain all three layers of identity: (1) personal identity to (2)
collective identity and (3) hashtag identity. These activist posts are public displays of attributes, goals, and interests, while at the same time, they reveal many of the more complex shared meanings and experiences. Conceptualizing identity in this way forces a reexamination of collective identity development in online activism, as it cannot be analyzed as a separate aspect of movement development. Collective identity must be analyzed within the contexts of personal identity and hashtag identity, since activists are using these posts as places where their personal identities can comeingle with their broader collective interests and identities. These layers of identity form the larger hybrid identity of the movement and each layer is integral to the establishment of this identity.

The following will provide an overview of identity development in social movements, from personal identity, to collective identity and then to hashtag identity.

**Personal Identity, Collective Identity, Hashtag Identity and Beyond**

“The personal is political” is a phrase that became popular during the 1960s. It was meant to challenge the status quo of the era and put personal experiences, needs, and rights on the public agenda (Harutyunyan et al. 2009). Despite the popularity of the phrase in movement discourse, movements (and movement leaders especially) were more inclined to emphasize the significance of the many over the few, or rather the collective over the personal. However, the construction of collective identity is not a perfect science. Activists and minorities within movements sometimes experience the development of a collective identity as constraining. Naples et al. (2015) posit that collective identity becomes constraining through the establishment of boundaries that delineate who belongs to the movement and who does not. When movements are starting to mobilize, the leaders of movements promote broad and general collective identities in...
order to attract more members. As the movement develops, however, the boundaries that define membership contract resulting in more specific and selective collective identities. The logic here is that though fewer people may fit within the collective identity established, the people that do will be far more dedicated to the movement.

The adverse effects of collective identity boundary constraints play a role in the evolution and fracturing of several offline movements, particularly the Women’s movement and the LGBTQ movement. The Women’s movement tends to evolve as new generations of women enter into it. However, many feel that the various iterations of this movement from the 1960s onward have not been inclusive enough and the scope of the movement is limited to a particular kind of woman, specifically white Middle class women. This led to exclusionary practices that made minority groups of women feel as if they are not included in the movement (Hoffman 2016). Similarly, the Trans community voiced opposition to the goals and objectives of the LGBTQ movement. Members of this population claim that the goals and objectives of the movement do not reflect the concerns or the needs of Trans individuals; rather they primarily reflect the interests of the lesbian and gay populations who are striving to make their collective identity more palatable for mainstream society (Sorensen and Siemson 2006). These examples point to the fact that collective identities can at times be so constraining that they exclude individuals that are by design meant to be included. The examples of minority women within the Women’s movement and Trans individuals within the LGBTQ movement suggest that there are activists who desire the collective identities of their movements to be more fluid, flexible and inclusive.
Even before movements started to shift their attention to online tools, Joshua Gamson (1995) bemoaned the fact that many scholars either latently or explicitly, endorse the notion that social movements need a stable and composed collective identity in order to act. The scholars he referenced adamantly maintained that a collective with a fluid or indistinct identity is incapable of mobilizing as successfully as those with cohesive identities. Gamson (1995) argues that these types of conclusions do not account for movements that are actively attempting to blur or call into question identity categories. He observes that this is what occurs in movements that involve sexual identity. In these movements, activists would rather destabilize identity than create one. Johnston, Larana and Gusfield (1994) proposed that this shift to more fluid identity work was indicative of a larger transition from “old” to “new” social movements. The new social movements eschewed concrete identity practices because the members were in the midst of their own identity searches. Therefore, as long as the individual identities of the activists were in flux, the collective identities would be as well.

These findings intentionally complicate the personal/collective identity divide. They are not separate entities, rather they are interconnected and the development of one impacts the other. Melucci (1996) further complicated the personal/collective identity divide by suggesting that collective identity cannot be fully separated from personal identity, for the “we” developed for the purposes of solidarity also shapes other social and personal identities. These conceptions of the role that identity plays in movements suggest that scholars need to account for the various social contexts that inform how identity is developed and deployed. In order to understand the collective, it may at first be necessary to understand the personal and ideological purposes of activists. This is
supported by the findings in this chapter, which suggest that it is not just the sense of “we,” but also the sense of “me,” or personal identities” that inspires solidarity and serves broader movement purposes.

Bennett and Segerberg (2012) find this to be the case in more recent social movements and posit that the emphasis on uniqueness, or as they call it, personalization, is due to new preferred methods of collective action. They suggest that the new methods of collective action stem from different motivations for engaging in that action. In the standard form of collective action, people participate in a movement because of the promise of or desire to receive external incentives or rewards. Therefore, many of the benefits of participation are rewards provided by others: other participants, the media, the organization being targeted, etc. They propose that new movements are engaging in connective action, which is “an act of personal expression and recognition or self-validation achieved by sharing ideas and actions in trusted relationships” (Bennett and Segerberg 2012: 752-753). This type of action is motivated by internal or personal incentives, which leads to a wide variety of personal expressions for the purposes of political expression. Lance Bennett proposes that increased personalization of politics “further undermines the appeal of adopting collective identification with party, ideology, or conventional movements” (Bennett 2012: 26). Together these findings suggest that the newer form of connective action yields personal expressions that are in line with the ethos of these movements, but they come at the cost of collective identity development.

Recent studies support these findings by focusing on the personalization of collective identity and how it has impacted social movement development. Liu et al. (2017: 721) argue that this new relationship to identity has led to the growth of what they
refer to as “identity hashtag movements.” Some examples of this include new iterations of the women’s movement, the LGBTQ movement, the trans visibility movement, and Black Lives Matter (Dixon 2014; Bonilla and Rosa 2015; De Kosnik and Feldman 2019). These movements “use personal identity to reshape and reclaim the broader public image of a marginalized group” (Liu et al. 2017: 721). In other words, the identity labels contained in the hashtags reflect the cultural stories and agency of the groups that they are meant to reflect. The hashtags, then, culturally encode the posts made by these activists, so that onlookers have a contextualized frame of reference for how to interpret the messages (Konnelly 2015). These two studies propose that the hashtags are ultimately emblematic of collective identity because they inspire the production of new content in a mimetic fashion and these posts build upon the collective. However, hashtags, even those reflecting identity, are often contaminated or appropriated by critics or activists from counter movements. This suggests that hashtags are not the collective identity solution for online social movements. They are a marker of collective identity but not fully reflective of the identity itself.

As a marker of collective identity, it is more beneficial to consider hashtags as tools for social organization and research purposes. In their study of #Ferguson, Bonilla and Rosa (2019: 5) discuss the hashtag as being “an indexing system in both the clerical sense and the semiotic sense.” In the clerical sense, people can use the hashtag to retrieve information and comments about the event and in the semiotic sense; people can use the hashtag to interpretatively frame their comments. Consequently, they say hashtags, “operate in ways similar to library call numbers: They locate texts within a specific

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8 This is a subject that I will explore in a future study. There has been little discussion of this in academic circles.
conversation, allowing for their quick retrieval, while also marking texts a being “about” a specific topic” (Bonilla and Rosa 2019: 5). Pond and Lewis (2019: 228) agree with the utility of the hashtag as a retrieval tool, but contend that the hashtag does not always do the best job of revealing what a text is actually about because they are an “arbitrary signifier.” They do not provide a contextualized understanding of the collective or the type of connective action they represent, therefore, analyzing the hashtag and its popularity quantitatively reveals very little about the actual ideological components of the movement. It is for this reason; they suggest that hashtags must be analyzed discursively.

As I display below, discourse provides additional layers of identity necessary to fully understand the significance of the hashtag.

Like the movements that Gamson (1995) spoke of, online movements display a desire to blur identities and the boundaries that separate them. As Melucci (1996) anticipated, the influence of collective identity extends beyond solidarity, which is something that Polletta and Jasper (2001) seem to advocate as well. However, in their work, they propose that the fluidity of collective identity has its limit. That limit is reached when personalization takes the place of connection. The focus on personalization also has its limits. Bennett and Segerberg’s (2012) observations, though accurate, perpetrate some of the same errors of social movements literature in the past. They are creating a mutually exclusive dynamic of identity engagement that leaves little room for the personal to coexist with the collective. Attempts to account for how the personalization of identity has impacted movements online led some to conclude that activists are producing collective identities in their hashtags. However, I argue that this
does not adequately account for either the relationship between personal or collective identity or how identities develop online.

The following findings suggest that activists are developing their identities through the layering of their (1) personal, (2) collective and (3) hashtag identities. When taken together, these layers of identity paint a more comprehensive picture of the collective. This typology of identity provides a more constructive and comprehensive method of analyzing identity online. Most importantly, it provides a compelling argument for researchers not to dismiss any movement that initially appears to be overly reliant upon personal identity.

**Layers of Identity**

*Personal Identity*

When reading through the online posts of these movements, the first content that the viewer comes across is highly personal information about the individual activist. Disclosures such as these inspire some activists to justify the content that they are sharing. Many go on to note that this activity is a rather unique form of engagement for them. For example, an Occupy Wall Street activist remarks:

> I am not a joiner and have never been much interested in politics (perhaps because I have sensed it was all a sham and have given in to cynicism) yet seeing this movement has excited me. It is the first genuine thing in politics that I have seen in 40 years. (OWS 621)

This activist from the Occupy movement justifies the sharing of content by making reference to the genuineness of the movement. According to this activist, then, the movement is unique and therefore, their engagement with the movement is warranted. The genuineness that they and others refer to is commonly attributed to the fact that people of many different backgrounds make themselves vulnerable by posting images
and narratives that reflect their struggles. Activists in the Swan Queen movement make similar comments throughout the discourse. Members of the movement remark that the body of content on Tumblr and the passion exhibited within it inspire a heightened sense of connection to the movement and to the collective. For example, when discussing their engagement on Tumblr, one individual wrote, “I’ve never felt a truer sense of belonging before. I have found some of my greatest friends and people that I can’t imagine my life without” (SQ 708). Both comments indicate that sharing on Tumblr is part of the process of connection and the generation of collectives. As discussed in the literature review, the typical sources of connections that people find in social movement collectives are based in common characteristics and experiences. In these discourses, however, commonalities begin with the sharing of personal information, much of which could be considered specific to that individual.

Personal information is generally considered to be that which addresses the specifics of who we are in our daily lives, such as “what we eat, wear, and enjoy; how we make love, cope with personal problems, or plan or shun careers” (Johnston, Larana and Gusfield 1994: 8). Despite the fact that a wide variety of personal and very specific information is provided throughout the posts from both movements, they most often begin by providing information about their age followed by statuses and then descriptors that influence their self-image and their perspectives of their lives. The following are examples of the first couple of opening sentences from Occupy activists:

I am a 24 year old college graduate. I have a B.A. in English. (OWS 987)

I am 22 years old. I am currently in college and have a $60,000 debt in student loans so far. (OWS 467)

I’m a 24 y/o single mom & full time student. (OWS 345)
I am 31 years old. I served a year in Iraq as an infantryman. (OWS 215)
I am 19 years old. I graduated from high school with almost a straight A average. (OWS 423)
I am a freshman in college. My dream is to go to law school…But I don’t think that is going to happen. (OWS 508)
I am a college graduate that spent the last several years working for non-profits along with my wife. (OWS 672)
I am 25 yrs. Old. I have lived in the USA for 22 yrs. (OWS 543)
I am 19 years old. I’ve lived in poverty my entire life (OWS 461)
I am a 27 year old Iraq veteran (OWS 574)
I am 26 years old. I have worked at the same job since I was 17. (OWS 258)
I am 32 years old and am married and live in Michigan, one of the most economically challenged states, currently. (OWS 242)
I am 26 years old, I have a 2 year old daughter and 4 step children. (OWS 1112)
I am a 31-year-old college graduate with $65K+ in student loan debt. (OWS 1244)
I am an 18 year old working political science/art student. (OWS 1387)
I am a middle-aged man working three part-time jobs that pay anywhere between $11 and $17 an hour. (OWS 1250)

Activists frequently focus on specific statuses, credentials and life experiences. Referring to being a mom, graduating from college or living in poverty, then sets the scene for the discussion of movement related issues to follow, such as concerns about jobs and debt. In this way, the personal identity markers are provided as a way of establishing credibility as a member of the 99%.

Personal identities in the Swan Queen movement feature similar “I am” statements but provide some different types of information. As seen below these statements provide various pieces of information about the person and their personality that contextualize who they are in the world:

I am 21 and currently studying Illustration in Brighton, England! (SQ 24)
I’m 31yo, and I live in Brazil. I’m an architect and a restaurant owner. (SQ 242)

I’m 22 years old, living in Canada, born in Brasil. I’m a recent graduate in Graphic Design, and searching for a job (SQ 124)

I’m 30 years old, identify as a lesbian, been in therapy for almost 2 years, am taking medication for the depression, and am all around much happier in life. (SQ 322)

I’m 26 and currently in northwest florida. I’ve been in college for an age and still have absolutely no clue what i’m supposed to be doing with my life. (SQ 156)

I’m 30, and I live near Orlando, FL. I currently teach high school English, but I’m about to be unemployed because I just can’t continue to be a part of this broken public education system (SQ 742)

I’m a 21 girl who has no idea how to adult (SQ 229)

I am a 45 year old mother of 4. I’m married, straight, a stay-at-home mom, a lover of books, and have just a little obsession with swan queen. (SQ 378)

I’m 24 years old and I’m from the Czech Republic. (SQ 416)

I’m 27 years old and according to some friends too old to be on Tumblr. (SQ 673)

I’m 23 years old, from Toronto Canada. (SQ 375)

I’m 52 and live in The Netherlands with my partner and our 4 cats. (SQ 547)

I’m from Scotland, 25 and I’ve been awake for 34 hours. (SQ 609)

I’m 24, from Missouri, USA. I work full-time at a bookstore and part-time at a library. (SQ 127)

I am a lesbian, 28 years old, living in Minnesota. (SQ 652)

I live in Turkey, I’m 24 years old, straight, single and happy. (SQ 812)

Similar to the statements provided by Occupy activists, the personal identities of the Swan Queen movement also feature credentials and experiences, but they are less likely to feature statuses. Two notable inclusions here are location-based identity markers and sexuality markers. The inclusion of location markers reflects the fact that members of this collective are located around the globe. Their access to this movement is not hindered by distance or by access to a television program that is based in the United States. This
provides the sense that this is an international movement. The sexuality markers reflect
the desire for these individuals to place themselves within the sexuality spectrum in order
to better contextualize any comments regarding sexuality that will follow. It is not
immediately clear that these individuals are trying to establish their credibility as
anything other than themselves. As activists, they are trying to flesh out their literal
humanity in a space where they only previously functioned as fans.

From all of the content above, it is clear that the most common identity marker is
age. The implication here is that activists include their age as an attempt to contextualize
who they are in space and time. Age identity, according to Carr et al. (2008: 10), “is the
outcome of the processes through which one identifies with or distances oneself from
different aspects of the aging process.” In this way, age identity is less about actual years
lived as it is about the way that once feels at different ages. Therefore, to understand age
identity it is important to understand the context in which age is shared. For instance, in
the Occupy identity markers, people may be sharing their age to emphasize the
disconnect between their age and their experiences, as in someone who is very young but
has a substantial amount of debt. Age is a reflection of their lived experiences and the
fact that there are certain expectations associated with different ages. This is made most
evident in two of the statements above (OWS 258 and SQ 673). The age in the first
statement presents the viewer with the awareness that the individual has occupied the
same job for nine years. This sets the stage for a discussion of jobs and debt, as will be
seen in the next section. The expectation here is that this individual should have been able
to move on to another, and potentially better position within that span of time. The
second quote indicates that there are certain assumptions about the appropriate age of a
A Tumblr user. Including their age, then, suggests that they are taking part in the movement despite this expectation. Statements such as these are often followed by concerns about sexuality and representation, which will be addressed below.

**Collective Identity**

The personal identities of the individuals are the building blocks upon which activists develop their collective identities. In their discussion of social ties and activism, McAdam and Paulsen (1993) address the significance of identity in social movement recruitment. Successful recruitment involves “creating a positive association between the movement and a highly salient identity” (McAdam and Paulsen 1993: 641). Absent a formal recruiting process, online activists are doing this work for themselves by connecting their personal identifiers to their collective identifiers. After the personal identity statements above, activists move on to discuss other aspects of their experiences and beliefs that they feel are relevant to their sense of belongingness in the movement. This shift to the next layer of identity is made clear throughout the themes of the posts. The themes reveal fairly communal understandings of who the collective is. However, the themes are not often acknowledged as explicit collective identity labels.

As mentioned in the introduction, I am using Fominaya’s construct of “product” and “process” identity in order to prove the existence of collective identity within these movements and create a more intelligible method of identifying collective identity in online discourse. Below, the first set of findings reflects “shared attributes, goals, and interests” and the second reflects “shared meanings, experiences, and reciprocal emotions.”
**Shared Attributes, Goals, and Interests**

The shared attributes, goals, and interests of the movements are still explored in very personal terms. However, the frequent occurrence of several key themes promotes a more comprehensive overview of the collective concerns of the movement than is immediately evident in the personal identity statements above or the hashtags of the movements discussed later in the chapter.

As discussed in the case overview chapter, the offline component of the Occupy movement was unable to establish a clear layout of attributes and goals. The movement was primarily associated with income and wealth inequality but was unable to position itself in a way to concretely address these concerns. The discourse of the online mobilization, however, takes a much clearer position about the ultimate problems that the movement should address. They do this by establishing shared attributes, goals, and interests related to jobs and debt:

I have $33,000+ to pay in student loans. (I’m barely paying interest.) I can’t find a full time job because I have no experience…no one will hire me so I can gain some! (OWS 987)

I’m not looking for fame, glory or fortune. I’m looking for a job. Is that too much to ask? (OWS 85)

I have a **part-time** retail job where I make **less than $9/hour**. I go to school full-time to earn my Bachelor’s degree. I would get a second job if I could but there just aren’t any in my town. (bolded by the activist, OWS 215)

My wife and I both lost our jobs over a year ago. Non-profits have cut their hiring and operate on shoestring budgets. I have had 6 interviews after sending out over 200 resumes this past year. Not a single job offer is in sight. (OWS 672)

I am currently in college and have a $60,000 debt in student loans so far. I took out a $20,000 in private loans to help my parents with the bills and mortgage that is sucking us dry…I am 22 years old I have been applying for jobs since I was 18 years old including McDonalds. After several interviews, hundreds of applications I still don’t have a job. I cry every night because I want to help my family out (OWS 467)
I am a sophomore in college and I’m already $40,000 in debt. My father has been unemployed for four years, he even has a graduate level education. I’m afraid of the debt I will have in the future, and of the chance that I won’t be able to find a job out of school. (OWS 468)

When I graduate I’ll have $40,000 in student loans to pay back. I’ll be making a maximum of $25,000 a year. I already owe over $40,000 in medical debt. I’m not sure I’ll ever be debt free. (OWS 102)

My whole life, I have lived paycheck to paycheck. I know what it is like to sit at school & wonder if I would come home to lights & running water; more than once, these amenities were taken from us. I have prayed and prayed for a miracle. I am working off my mother’s debt, who is trapped underneath her student loans and her parents debt. (OWS 368)

Though these statements differ in terms of specific content and even structure, they present a clear critique of the state of the economy and the benefits of education. The shared attributes of the individuals above are that they are eager job seekers, members of the underpaid working class and debtors. In some instances, they are also students who are attempting to navigate the expectations of what their education would help them achieve with the reality of student debt that they are left with (which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5). The overall goals presented here are to secure high paying jobs and get out of debt. The job seekers are looking for opportunities to improve their circumstances but are finding many employers unwilling to hire them. For those in the underpaid working class, they find themselves unable to find work that allows them to live without strain. Their bills and debts compound the financial strains that they experience. The shared interests of the group seem to be intermingled in the goal-oriented statements, meaning that their overall interest is in financial security. Where this content diverges from Fominaya’s (2010) “product” construct is that displays of emotion accompany the development of shared attributes, goals, and interests. The dominant emotions exhibited in these passages are hopelessness and defeat. Many feel that they
may never be able to find another job and even if they do, they may never be free of the debt that they accrued.

The shared attributes, goals, and interests of the Swan Queen movement are related to issues of sexuality and LGBTQ+ representation. Upon initial inspection, the role of sexuality as a collective identifier was not immediately apparent in the Swan Queen discourse. This was because many of the initial concerns of those involved were the sexuality of the characters on the television program Once Upon a Time. However, themes within the narratives suggest that addressing the sexuality of the characters served as inspiration for many to reflect on their own sexuality and representation of LGBTQ+ individuals:

Swan Queen was actually my very first queer ship, and I’ll be completely honest, it definitely helped me to accept my own identity and my general abhorrence of strict labels and obsessive categorization. (SQ 593)

I have struggled with my sexuality my whole life, only recently accepting that I’m bisexual and quite proud of that. It’s weird, Swan Queen just make me feel like it’s ok to be different, and I know that as long as I have hope, everything will be ok (SQ 298)

Through them I discovered my own sexuality as well as learned to accept and love everyone. I am so grateful that I discovered this show; as shitty as it may be, and as much as I may disagree with the choices of the writers, they have given us so much to love. (SQ 303)

I know there’s this whole discussion about how what you ship has nothing to do with what you are, that you don’t have to be gay to ship a gay couple etc, and it’s true but it is also true that sometimes it does, and drowning into swan queen really helped me figured myself out. That’s one of the things why this ship is so important, young LGBTQ people need to see themselves represented in order to feel more accepted. (SQ 286)

I also feel that having (positive) representation on a show like Ouat would mean so much to queer and/or questioning fans across the world, simply because it would mean that we would get to see a piece of our reality represented, and by two extremely talented actresses at that! I might already be married to my TL, but it doesn’t mean that I never struggle with my sexuality and the way society treats us. (SQ 167)

I believe SwanQueen really matters in terms of representation (even tho I understand that you can identify as LGBTQ+ or be an ally and still not ship it, that’s totally fine) but yeah, we need more of this on TV and we need more of this in Italy too! (SQ 657)
SQ opened me up to wanting to see more representation on screen of what I believed was love and was me...Representation is important, so very important and I hope we live in a world soon where everyone regardless of race, sexual identity, gender identity or religion can see themselves on screen. (SQ 324)

Swen [Swan Queen Nation] isn’t just a fandom either, it’s a movement. A movement to show that working for what you want has its rewards, and a movement that aims to bring LGBTQ+ women into the spotlight. I didn’t identify as bisexual until a little less than a year ago, so until then I didn’t really realize the importance of this representation. (SQ 236)

These statements make it clear that the concerns of many of the individuals in this movement supersede those concerns that are directly related to the program itself. The dominant shared attributes of this collective are those who have newly found their sexuality and/or those who have struggled with their sexuality in the past. The relationship between the two characters, Emma and Regina, (as they envision it) caused them to reflect on their own sexual desires. Seeing the potential for the relationship, and the fact that there is a community of fans that support this relationship, normalized the experience of being LGBTQ+. This discourse seems to be less explicitly goal-oriented, but the experiences of discovery and struggle informed the interests that the movement developed in increased representation of LGBTQ+ characters and romances. They discuss the significance of the Swan Queen couple as being a form of representation that can similarly normalize LGBTQ+ lifestyles for other generations, especially for those who may also be LGBTQ+. According to the last statement, it is this orientation towards representation that makes the fandom a movement. Compared to the Occupy statements, the emotions exhibited here are not as clear. In some cases, the individuals express gratitude for finding Swan Queen and the community that supports it. They also express gratitude that the community was able to introduce these individuals to a cause that went beyond their normal fan practices. What is also clear is that this community inspires openness and vulnerability about experiences of sexual identity. There is a sense of hope
that rings through the statements advocating representation, something that will be explored in Chapter 5.

It is in this theme where the two movements diverge in their commonalities the most. The Occupy movement, with its economic concerns, engenders a discourse focused on financial problems, goals, and experiences. These concerns are conveyed in very emotional terms that speak to relative hopelessness. Also, they do not display evident shared interests in the movement, per se; their shared interests are actually their individual interests in financial stability. The shared interests are more implied within their goal orientation, suggesting that their shared interests are work and debt related. On the other hand, the Swan Queen movement, express shared interests in fandom, queer narratives in general and the Swan Queen narrative in particular. Also, because the concerns of those in the Swan Queen movement are more directly tied to sexuality, their discourse encourages disclosure similar to coming out. In this way, their shared interests also appear to be very personal in origin.

According to the patterns in shared attributes, goals and interests, the ways in which people create collective identity is similar in both movements. There is a clear blending of personal attributes, goals and interests that aggregate into collective concerns of the movement. The analysis of the discourses, therefore, paint a clearer picture of the overall intentions of the movement than do the explicit statements of interests and goal orientation made by some of the movement organizers. This similar process of identity construction has yielded two very different collective identities. This suggests that this format and the digital space of Tumblr are conducive to the development of a wide range of collectives and social movements. In a similar vein, the process-oriented aspects of
collective identity development are also evident in the discursive patterns related to shared meanings, experiences and reciprocal emotions.

*Shared Meanings, Experiences, and Reciprocal Emotions*

As discussed in the literature above, collective identity is most closely tied to the development of shared meanings, particularly those having to do with the collective as a unit. For offline movements, this development takes place in the interactions that occur in physical meeting places and protest sites of the movement. However, online this process occurs within interactions and written discourse. Within discourse, shared meanings are cultivated through negotiations of collective belonging. As will be seen throughout the discourse of the two movements, collective belonging is not always connected to collective identity markers related to the movement explicitly; rather it is connected to the individual interpretation of the collective ethos.

As shown above, the more product-oriented claims of the Occupy Wall Street movement proclaimed the population to be frustrated and disenfranchised financially. This partly related to the premise of income inequality that pervades both the offline and online discourse of the movement. The process-oriented claims of the movement, however, further contextualize the experiences of the individuals as terrible, but not as truly terrible as they could be. Throughout the discourse, many of the activists made reference to luck and fortune in order to convey their conviction that they are not the only individuals struggling:

> Still, I consider myself very *lucky* to have what I have. I am deeply concerned with what has transpired in this country for the last thirty years. (OWS 723)

> I consider myself very *lucky* that I have been able to support my family with my wife and I, both working multiple jobs as freelancers…Our lives could be much worse (OWS 539)
BUT I still consider myself **lucky**. I have to opportunity to get an education – many do not. (OWS 477)

Two years ago, I was diagnosed with skin cancer, and because I was one of the truly **fortunate** ones, I was able to receive medical treatment that I know millions in this country alone cannot afford to have when they’re sick and scared, in pain and in need. On January 4th of this year, I was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease called Multiple Sclerosis (MS). Once again, the fact that I am one of the very **luckiest** never escapes my mind or my heart. (OWS 69)

I realize that I am **fortunate** enough to have a job, a home, medical coverage, food, a car, and other things. Many aren’t. I also realize that the reason my friends and I are is the same reason many aren’t. I am the 99% (OWS 360)

I will be able to pay my student loans back, but I am one of the **lucky** ones. (OWS 131)

I am one of the **lucky ones** because I am healthy, working, and have the support of my family and boyfriend. I am the 99 percent. (OWS 804)

I am asking for equality. I’m tired of a system based on luck rather than hard work. And I’m one of the **lucky ones**. (OWS 78)

I am one of the **lucky ones**...
I fought for my country, had friends die for this country.
I am grateful to not have student loans, but my fiance will have over 75k in student loans once it’s all said and done.
I am a Licensed Practical Nurse will no job prospects.
I haven’t been employed in over a year. (OWS 826)

I am **“lucky”**, I suppose, but every day, after a 10 hour workday, I am exhausted, stressed, and terrified tomorrow might be my last day at work. (OWS 748)

The references to luck and fortune suggest that one of the dominant shared meanings in this discourse is that these individuals do not believe themselves to be alone in their hardships. The personal identity content here could be interpreted as more evidence of personal information throughout the discourses; however, the personal experiences are shared here in order to address concerns about the collective. The references to luck and fortune also appear to be another form of credibility and a source of emotional connection to the movement and the rest of the 99%, some of which may fall into the category of the unlucky and therefore, unable to stand up and fight for their needs. Furthermore, the frequent use of the term “lucky” especially suggests a shared linguistic norm indicating
that this term is integral in their collective meaning-making process. In the use of this term, the most apparent emotion is one of frustration. The frustration is based on the suggestion that people who experience a multitude of economic hardships should not consider themselves the “lucky ones.”

Frustration is also exhibited in the statements made by individuals in the Swan Queen movement. The shared meaning of the movement is directly connected to the story that inspired the movement in the first place. From the narrative of the Once Upon a Time programs, members of the Swan Queen community gathered evidence for the possibility that the two characters, Emma and Regina, would one day have a romantic relationship. This evidence led to an alternative interpretation of the canon text, that many felt was a legitimate and potentially accurate reading of the subtext of the program. They are often frustrated by the inability of others to see why their interpretation of the canon content of Once Upon a Time makes sense:

I’m an optimistic person and still believe in the possibility of Swan Queen, it happened in other shows so why not this one, it would make so much sense. (SQ 134)

Long story short, Emma and Regina are perfect for each other and are the only pairing that makes sense. (SQ 823)

I think Swan Queen was meant to be from the start, it just makes too much sense, I tell you if ANY of them were a guy they would already be kissing and stuff. (SQ 748)

It is honestly the only thing that makes sense on this damn show. (SQ 199)

I appreciate the constant reminder that what we see is NOT invalid and needs to be noticed by everyone, especially at this time of societal change. (SQ 288)

And now, we can see how much this relationship is so important, all is around Emma and Regina, always was but now the people can see this is not an illusion or something like that, they need to each other, they care and love each other, all this show is about love (SQ 317)

It makes so much narrative sense. Emma and Regina’s relationship has developed so beautifully. (SQ 252)
they’re the best two characters, they move the story, they have the best well written development and they make sense more than the other canon ships. (SQ 184)

I started as a multi-shipper (yes, both CS and OQ included), as I sometimes tend to do, but that did not last long. I quickly recognized the aspects that made the other relationships undesirable to me. As my love for these two ladies deepened, all there was for me was (and still is) Swan Queen. Everything else pales in comparison. They are the only couple who truly makes sense to me. (SQ 127)

It’s just such a poetic love story that makes sense. (SQ 189)

The activists here are making reference to their shared experiences with the program. One of the primary shared experiences that shape the collective identity of the movement is the experience of being a fan. The fans of Swan Queen put forth their interpretation of the canon text and were rejected by many in the fandom community. In the Swan Queen movement, however, these interpretations can be shared and embraced. The movement is the home of individuals who “see” and make “sense” of the canon, the Swan Queen relationship and the dynamics in fandom in very similar ways. Furthermore, as mentioned above these statements similarly exhibit frustration at the inability of others to see as they do. This reciprocal emotion suggests that the common tie between both movements is collective meaning and frustration.

In these statements, activists from both movements are exhibiting frustration, but in different ways. For Occupy, the frustration is related to broader concerns about society and the experiences of others. Conversely, the Swan Queen movement is collectively concerned about recognition. These diverging concerns were also reflected in the different role that experience played throughout the statements. In the Occupy discourse, the experiences contextualized the use of the word “lucky” in order to relativize the experiences of the activists. In the Swan Queen movement, however, experiences played a lesser role in place of interpretation. Despite the differences in theme or content, the
collective meaning making in both movements appear to serve as the equivalent of injustice frames. Gamson (1992) identified injustice frames as sets of beliefs that reflect the moral indignation of a social movement. These frames are often discussed in emotional terms and can aid in the development of collective identity. Gamson (1992) proposed that these frames were most widely used when movements were attempting to convey their message to the media. In the case of the two movements above, however, these frames are being used in public posts, which means that they are conveying meaning to others in the movement and outside the movement.

The presence of these frames is a clear indication of the existence of collective identity. However, collective identity is something that must be gleaned by those who read through the discourse, as opposed to something that is openly advertised as the collective identity of the movement. Ironically, the identity markers that are widely disseminated by the movements are also not a complete reflection of collective identity. However, there are still those who feel that hashtags are the clearest examples of collective identity for online social movements.

*Hashtag Identity*

Konnelly (2015: 11) suggests that hashtags serve as “markers of collective identity.” By this, they mean that they play the role of delineating boundaries between those who support a cause and those who do not. Hashtags are also sites of negotiation of meaning, as they often become the signifiers of the collective or cause they are connected to. The movements that are most likely to engage in hashtag activism as a form of identity politics are those of populations of people who have little to no control over how they are being depicted in mainstream media (Yang 2016). Therefore, hashtags have the
profound ability to raise awareness about the plight of those who are socially and politically disenfranchised (De Kosnik and Feldman 2019). These are all crucial functions of hashtags in online social movement identity development; however, I find that hashtags are an incomplete collective identity marker. It is necessary to treat them as a public and widely disseminated form of identity, while also establishing that the hashtag is not an absolute signifier of collective engagement or social movement membership. Consequently, analysis of hashtags is necessary in order to understand how information about the movements is retrieved, collected and circulated, but the hashtag should be treated as a layer of identity that must be further contextualized in order to assess how it serves collective identity purposes and how it does not.

The analysis of the discourse for both movements suggests that hashtags are more of an organizational tool for disseminating information and placing online posts within a broader context. In the case of Occupy, the hashtag that defined the movement #Wearethe99% was also a popular offline protest slogan, so it connected the offline and the online branches of the movement. The hashtag is a clear statement of solidarity. The use of the word “we” in particular suggests that the “we-ness” of the movement is based on the symbol of the 99%. The “99%” percent is thought to be the most salient collective identity of Occupiers. The meaning of this identity label for Occupiers is typically based on the literal definition of this term, which is the population of people other than the 1% who are forced to share a significantly smaller portion of the United States’ economic resources. However, this concept does not reflect the shared experiences, attributes or meaning making practices of the collective. As seen throughout the example above, the activists are placing themselves within the collective plight of the 99% by expounding
upon their relative luck and in a desire for jobs and economic opportunities. Yet, these are levels of nuance and context that can only be found when reading the posts in the discourse. The hashtags from this movement are most frequently used at the end of the post to signal the closing of the text. The impression that this gives is that all of the content provided above leads the activist to the ultimate conclusion that they too belong to the 99%.

The hashtag most commonly used for activist purposes of the Swan Queen movement was #BelieveinSwanQueen. This hashtag is also a statement. It is meant to reflect the collective beliefs of the movement. Within fandom circles, this hashtag would signal to the viewer that these posts concern fandom shipping practices. The labels of ships often involve the combination of names and the movement has taken on this label as well. Accordingly, the phrase “believe in Swan Queen” is an open invitation for the viewer to engage in a similar interpretation of the Swan Queen relationship. Outside of these circles, however, few would know how to interpret this hashtag, so this hashtag also assists in the construction of insider and outsider groups and identities. The insiders in this instance are those who are familiar with fandom and the outsiders are those who are not. Therefore, the hashtag does little to reflect the collective identity of the Swan Queen movement as being something other than a fandom. In other words, the hashtag does not indicate the collective identity of this movement as being a social movement addressing a contentious issue. In these posts, the hashtags will be placed at the beginning and at the end, essentially bookending the content that is in between. Therefore, entering into the reading of the post, the content could be interpreted as fandom specific, but the content
within the post, which often relates to contention and issues of LGBTQ+ sexuality and representation, recontextualizes the hashtag as a marker of activism.

The discourse from both movements suggests that hashtags should not be interpreted as the sole indicators of collective identity. In both cases, the hashtags are symbolic, for Occupy the hashtag is symbolic of a population and for Swan Queen the hashtag is symbolic of a relationship. However, their use of the hashtag differs in terms of placement within the post. One of the potential reasons for Occupy’s dominant use of the hashtag at the end of the narrative could be that the symbol of the 99% and the phrase “we are the 99%” was already well known within the mainstream media and on social media. This already contextualized the narratives as contentious and as part of the offline mobilization. The Swan Queen movement, on the other hand, experienced issues of establishing their legitimacy both as a concept (in terms of their reading of the relationship) and as a movement (in terms of the seriousness of the issues they are addressing). Therefore, the hashtag at the beginning was a signal to collective fan practices, while the hashtag at the end was a signal of collective activist beliefs. Therefore, interpreting hashtags as markers of collective identity is a more complicated process than originally proposed by those who identify hashtags as a comprehensive form of collective identity.

In actuality, the hashtags serve as both collective and social identities. This is because the hashtags are better at connecting the activist content on Tumblr with the bigger collectives that the movements can be said to belong to. In the case of Occupy Wall Street, the hashtag connects the online mobilization to the offline mobilization and in the case of the Swan Queen movement, the hashtag connects the online mobilization to
the broader fandom community. Therefore, the hashtags identity markers are meant to appeal to a population larger than those who developed it and those who use it most often. The hashtags make the content retrievable by not only those in the movement or those interested in the movement but those who may occupy positions in adjoining collectives.

Discussion: Hybrid Identity as Layers of Identity

When subject to standard conventions of social movement concepts and analysis, the conclusion that could be drawn from this analysis is that the posts are devoid of collective identity because a preponderance of the content is highly personal. This is compounded by the fact that shared attributes, meaning making practices and emotions are not immediately apparent to the viewer. There is additional interpretive work that must be involved to access the collective identity practices of these movements fully. This begs the question, is this ultimately going to be a successful predecessor for spreading the movement or bringing about change?

If success is determined in terms of offline mobilization, then, the answer is highly context dependent. In the case of Occupy, online mobilization occurred at the same rate as offline mobilization. Then, in the case of Swan Queen, offline mobilization did not occur. However, a close reading of the discourses indicates that offline protest was not the ultimate goal for both movements. Be that as it may, the identity practices engaged in by the activists from both movements all provided information that reflected both their offline and online identities. The detailed personal information and experiences connected the activists to their offline identities, while their engagement in collective meaning making connected them to their online identities and movements. Furthermore,
Fominaya’s concepts of “product” and “process” identity (2010) proved to be useful in identifying where collective identity existed in the discourses. The order and the structure of the posts are such that collective identity follows personal identity, but there is no apparent prioritization of product over process or vice versa. Consequently, where it may be useful for researchers to make such distinctions between “product” and “process” for the purposes of analysis, it is important to note that activists themselves make no such distinction. The post as a representative form is meant to reflect all identities provided by the activist. The posts that circulated the internet served as signs and signals of ongoing attention to the movement and its cause, while the nuances of the content revealed various aspects of the shared attributes, goals, interests, meanings, experiences, and reciprocal emotions that were not immediately obvious in either the personal identity or the hashtag of the post.

Therefore, the activists’ purposes, intentional or not, resulted in the creation of hybrid identities, which are capable of encompassing their range of identities. This aspect of hybrid identity covers a range of identities from the personal to the collective and the hashtag. This range of identities indicates that these posts are meant to serve a variety of identity practices, from personal development, to public displays of identity and also the creation of a “polyvocal public discourse” (Milner 2013). The latter is most clearly displayed in hashtag identity. For discourse to be polyvocal it means that it includes a wide range of voices, backgrounds and perspectives. This discourse, therefore, includes those who support the movement, those who are against it and those who are neutral towards it. The purpose of a hashtag as a polyvocal symbol is to facilitate circulation. It is incapable of dictating the content it is associated with.
Before wrapping up, I would like to return to the subject of personal identity. One of the most interesting aspects of the personal identity statements is that they do not frequently include gender or race. In the Occupy movement, there is not a clear disparity in gender, and there are a number of minorities represented. However, issues related to gender discrimination or racism rarely enter into the discourse. In the Swan Queen discourse, gender discrimination is discussed in terms of heteronormativity, or the possibility that if one of the female characters were a man, the Swan Queen pairing would not be an issue. However, this is a predominantly female collective, so the need to address gender is not as imperative. Additionally, there are even fewer discussions of race in this discourse. Discussion of ethnicity is occasionally present when referencing the fact that one of the actresses in the Swan Queen pairing is Latina. It would behoove researchers to investigate the role that racial identity plays in movements where race is not an explicit issue addressed by the movement.

The overall findings from this analysis indicate that the development of collective identity online is complicated and is only one part of the identity development process. These findings counter those of researchers who feel that collective identity is either absent from or no longer needed within online social movements. Collective identity in these movements is much less a deliberate creation meant for public display; rather it is inherent to discursive collective meaning making. Additionally, the link forged between the personal identity and collective identity of the movement indicates that the activists believe that the personal content is fundamental to their engagement with the collective. Therefore, rather than detract from the collective identity, personal identity further reinforces the experience of collective belonging. This finding is consistent with those
studies that conclude that online interactions are often more meaningful when personal content is shared.

I conclude that the development of salient identities online involves the creation of hybrid identities that must involve all three-identity layers. These hybrid identities, then, are the ties that bind activists in their collective endeavors. One layer of this identity is not enough to conclusively link an individual to a cause, but the presence of all three is a significant indication of collective belonging. The next chapter on images and visual representation also examines three forms of representation that contribute to the identity of online activists and movements.
They say that a picture is worth 1,000 words. This is a phrase that is popularly used to describe paintings, images and photographs that contain a multitude of possible meanings to be interpreted by the beholder. Pictures online, however, are rarely unaccompanied by words. In fact, online posts include pictures that are commonly joined by captions, hashtags, explanations and sometimes stories, meaning that 1,000 words may already accompany these images. Therefore, the interpretation of the images is not based solely on the perspective of the beholder but is also informed by the perspective of the poster. This is especially true on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr, which are very visually oriented but also provide users with the option of including various kinds and various lengths of linguistic content with the posts. When activists create online posts, they typically make use of both the visual and linguistic affordances that these sites provide them. Despite the ubiquity of visual images associated with online protests, the images are left relatively unexamined, as researchers are more likely to focus on the linguistic content without considering the layered visual contexts in which they are embedded (Phillipps 2012; Ferreday 2017).

According to Ferreday (2017), social movement researchers make the mistake of prioritizing linguistic content over visual content due to the belief that the former contains more essential information about the individual poster and the movement; in contrast, he argues the most essential components of digital activism are actually in the visual contexts. Consequently, excluding visual contexts from studies of digital activism compromises the accuracy and integrity of the research. Therefore, this chapter seeks to...
assess the role that images play in digital protests where both images and text are present. Specifically, I aim to examine representations of the activists and how these representations either include or exclude the physical body of the activists. The studies of digital activism that most frequently take the visual contexts of activism into account are about movements that address politics of the physical body. Though the movements discussed do not explicitly navigate politics of the physical body, bodies play a prominent role in the images they share.

Movements concerned about politics of the physical body will often use a tactic called the “photobiographic campaign,” which involves the sharing of both images and narratives (Khazraee and Novak 2018: 2). This campaign takes the form of posts where images of the protester are posted along with stories about their experiences or relationships with certain aspects of their physical body and generally, the images are framed so that this aspect of their body is clear to the viewer. This can be seen in movements that address issues of body size, race, gender, health, disability, etc., for in their digital content the activists use images of the body as a central site of resistance (Kimpson 2001; Senft and Baym 2015; Beach 2017; Morrisey and Kimball 2017). Activists from the Occupy Wall Street and Swan Queen movements also use a form of the photobiographic campaign where stories about activists’ lives and their relationships to their respective social movements are placed alongside and in some cases within the photographs included in the post. Instead of adopting a fairly uniform strategy of visual representation focused on the body or specific body parts, both movements exhibit three dominant strategies of representation that each present a different framing and interpretation of bodies and the physical bodies of the activist. These strategies of
representation result in patterns of images that fall within these categories: (1) avatars, (2) partial selfies, and (3) selfies. The following will address how the terms “avatar” and “selfie” are defined and applied.

In communications and technology literature, the term “avatar” is used to describe countless forms of representation (Nowak and Fox 2018). In fact, there is near universal agreement in the literature that the avatar serves as a form of “digital representation”, but this is where the agreement ends (Nowak and Fox 2018: 33). The most common perspectives on the use of the term avatar suggest that the avatar either needs to be manifested in a graphical rendition of the body or a body (Nakamura 2002) or the avatar can depict non-graphical forms of representation, such as usernames or written descriptions (Fox and Ahn 2013). This range would suggest that all of the images discussed throughout this chapter are essentially avatars, as they are forms of digital representation that contain both graphical and non-graphical depictions. However, the definition of avatar used throughout coding and analysis of the data is as any graphical or non-graphical form of representation other than a photograph of the activist. This definition is based on the notion that “avatars are distinct selves, not just conduits for offline identities” (Proctor 2014). Based on this logic, I make distinctions between digital representations that are based entirely on online content, which qualify as avatars and digital representations that are based on offline photographs of activists in the collective, many of which qualify as a kind of selfie.

The “selfie” is popularly defined as a “self-generated digital photographic portraiture, spread primarily via social media” (Senft and Bym 2015: 1558). Colloquially, selfies are known to serve the purposes of representation and proof, or rather, the visual
evidence that “I did this” or “I went here.” However, selfies are also regarded as a significant form of representation in digital space, in that it “creates a presence in the absence of the physical self” (du Preez 2016: 6). In other words, it manifests the physical body in digital space and attaches online interactions to an offline self. Some research proposes that selfies are part of a “broader trend to view new technologies of self-documentation as emancipating,” (Schwarz 2010: 490) since it frees people of the constraints of their offline circumstances. This emancipation from offline circumstances makes it so that individuals can use selfies to participate in online social movements, as people can participate asynchronously from any geographical location. For a number of social movements, the selfie serves as the dominant form of visual representation (Ferreday 2017; Beach 2017; Morissey and Kimball 2017). In this study, the selfie will be regarded as those self-generated images where the full countenance of the individual is present and partial selfies are those images where the full countenance of the individual is obscured.

I find that the strategies of representation are reflected in the categories of (1) avatars, (2) partial selfies, and (3) selfies. These categories reveal the fact that activists are attempting to complicate typical notions of embodiment for activism. I also find that these strategies of representation and the spectrum of embodied practices that they create directly serves the purposes of hybrid identity formation for the movement and its individual activists. The activists are creating hybrid identity in that they are combining visual strategies borrowed from other social media and popular culture norms with social movement strategies. The visual identities are also hybrid in that there is not just one acceptable form of representation. There are three and each reflects a different balance of
offline and online identities. I propose that members of social movements where politics
of the physical body is absent develop a variety of strategies of representation to reflect
how activists are embodying their political cause and how the collective identities of the
movements are developed. Therefore, in producing a range of images, the activists are
displaying various interpretations of how to construct embodiment in digital space.

**Embodied Politics: Is a Physical Body a Requirement of Embodiment?**

The relationship between the body and activism is well established in social
movements literature. When politics is embodied, it is said to involve “physical, bodily
action that aims to provoke change by exercising and resisting power in everyday life”
(Fixmer and Wood 2005: 237). This definition evokes images of marches and protests on
the streets, where the physical body is visibly present in physical settings. This
connection of the physical body with embodiment complicates the extension of this
concept into analysis of online images, which are often thought of and labeled as forms of
representation alone. Embodiment is at times conceptualized as the opposite of
representation, where representation is an immaterial construction of the mind and the
body is material and therefore, irrefutable in its existence (Ihde 2010: 11-15). However,
digital content does not conform to this duality, interactions online can both be
experienced as representation and embodiment (Farrow and Iacovides 2014). The review
of the literature below will navigate through several different conceptualizations of
embodiment in order to ultimately arrive at a discussion of new experiences with
technology that are affording and promoting the development of images that serve as
representations and forms of embodiment.
When it comes to movements whose collective identity is rooted in solidarity based on the aspects of the physical body, such as movements based on gender and race, the presence of and deliberate drawing attention to the physical body are crucial aspects of embodiment and offline political protest (Parkins 2000). Despite the inherent connection to the physical body, embodiment is not conclusively achieved when there are physical bodies protesting offline. Contemporary movements that are successful at organizing offline, such as Black Lives Matter⁹, are repeatedly issued the critique that the bodies of activists must not only be present, but they must serve as representatives of the movement and its cause. For instance, there has been some dispute about the appearance of the physical bodies of the activists and how it influences perceptions of the movement. Barbara Reynolds (2015), a Civil Rights era activist, said, “At protests today, it is difficult to distinguish legitimate activists from the mob actors who burn and loot” because “the demonstrations are peppered with hate speech, profanity, and guys with sagging pants that show their underwear.” This critique of the appearance of the activists is based on the notion that the physical bodies and how they are attired are drawing attention away from the overall cause of the movement. The visual representations of the protesters are instead drawing connections between the protesters and derogatory racial stereotypes. In essence, this critique is about their inability to embody the cause.

According to the literature on embodiment, this critique reflects the fact that the presence of the physical body alone is not enough to achieve embodiment; rather embodiment is dependent upon the social contexts in which the body is defined

⁹ Black Lives Matter is a social movement that emerged due to the rise in police violence against black people. The movement began with the development of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag in 2013. The movement is responsible for demonstrations both online and offline to fight injustice.
Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), one of the preeminent scholars in the field of embodiment, proposed that the “lived human body” becomes embodied through the process of living in and adapting to spaces that are also “lived” and preconfigured before the bodies entrance into them. For Merleau-Ponty (1962: 60-61), the body anchors people in society, or as he put it, there is no “view from nowhere,” meaning that our view of the world is filtered through our bodies. However, the impact of the body is by no means limited to where the individual is physically anchored. This is because the body serves as a mediator between the individual and the social world and provides the individual with an expressive space to adapt to and reveal the inner workings of their consciousness (Merleau-Ponty 1962). The body, therefore, is more than just its physical composition; it is a reflection of experiences, consciousness and perceptions that allow individuals to act meaningfully in the world.

The types of meaningful action are generally context dependent, as different spaces, or environments, require different things from the body, such as different representations and performances (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008). Therefore, embodiment is highly contextual and is largely dependent upon how the body adapts to different contexts. Iris Marion Young (2005) expanded upon this in her discussion of the “body in-situation.” She explains that the facts of embodiment are dictated by the reality of the lived body and all its particularities, with layers of social context that inform how the body is perceived and how the body is viewed. When applied to analysis of online social movements, these theories suggest that the body is being adapted to fit the digital contexts where activism is performed. Additionally, the usefulness of Merleau-Ponty’s
conception of embodiment when applied to online activism is that online action rooted in the physical body can also be considered a form of embodied action.

Though the embodiment literature suggests that our online actions should be understood within the contexts of the physical body and how it is adapting to digital space, communications and technology literature come to several different conclusions, many of which demonstrate that the relationship between the body and the Internet proves to be rather complicated. Some literature on the Internet would suggest that there is little relationship between the body and activism because the Internet facilitates disembodiment or disconnection from the physical body and the identity of the person who possesses it (Bruckman and Berman 2001; Rudnicki 2017). Along these lines, there are studies on the Internet that conclude that digital tools encourage this kind of disembodiment or disconnection from the individual’s offline or consistent identity in day-to-day life (Rudnicki 2017). Rudnicki (2017) explains that digital tools facilitate the creation of fabricated identities that allow individuals to have full control over whom “they are” or rather, who they want to be. Online interactions and identity displays, then, were thought to be aspirational and “gamelike,” since people could switch roles and interests with ease (Bruckman and Berman 2001). The implication of these findings is that individuals are not compelled to treat their online interactions with the same level of significance of their offline interactions. Online interactions are associated with less apparent consequences, as any actions conducted within these identities cannot be readily tied back to who they are offline.

There are a number of studies that support these conclusions by referencing the popularity of agents and avatars, yet there are also other studies that suggest that even
these constructed and anonymous forms of representation can serve the purposes of embodiment. According to Lim and Reeves (2010), agents are representations that are computer generated, and avatars are representations that individuals are allowed to create for themselves. Within gaming contexts, neither the avatar nor the agent, reflect literal aspects of the physical body of the user. Studies show that people exhibit a preference for interacting via avatar in many online settings and in some cases prefer interacting with agents and avatars as opposed to interacting with people conceived of as being realistic online representations of themselves (Larson 2010; Kang and Gratch 2010). Despite the fact that agents and avatars are often discussed as belonging to the same category of representation, Campos-Castillo (2012) argues that the two actually facilitate two different kinds of online interaction. They claim that avatars are more successful at establishing connections and engendering feelings of co-presence in virtual environments. The digital body when seen as a creation of the individual using it is treated as a more profound form of representation with more perceived agency (Fox et al. 2015). This finding pushes up against the typical conclusions in the literature that suggest that constructed avatars and constructed identities primarily serve the purposes of anonymity.

In reality, the constructedness of the avatars is generally meant to represent interests, talents and personality in a way that establishes connection to the offline individual. Belk (2016: 478) believes that this speaks to the potential for avatars to be used for both disembodiment and reembodiment. Where the visual avatar may not reflect the actual appearance of the physical body, it may still reflect the qualities and thoughts of the individual behind the avatar. To substantiate this claim, Belk references Biocca’s
(1997) concept of the “phenomenal body,” which is composed of the external model of
the body (in terms of physical characteristics) and the “internal model of the self,” which
is made up of “perceived qualities or traits that ‘cause’ behavior, perceived states, etc.”
Therefore, when an avatar is used to reflect aspects of the internal model, it is
reembodying the individual in digital space. It is this quality of avatars that makes it an
especially useful tool in digital protest (Gerbaudo 2015).

In his discussion of protest avatars, Gerbaudo (2015) uses the definition of avatar
that includes static images that people share online or use as profile pictures. Gerbaudo
(2015: 918) argues, “protest avatars constitute ‘memetic signifiers,’ that is, symbolic
references that because of their inclusive and post-ideological content and their memetic
character, that is, their capacity to spread with extreme rapidity, are highly conducive to
processes of collective identification.” In other words, the inclusive and viral nature of
social media content facilitates the dissemination of protest images and makes the images
and therefore, the cause, accessible to a population that may not otherwise be exposed to
this content. Examples of this can be seen in viral trends where individuals change their
profile pictures to an image symbolic of the cause. During the Arab Spring, thousands of
people changed their profile picture to Khaled Said, whose death while in police custody
is one of the events that inspired the Egyptian Revolution (Gerbaudo 2015). Gerbaudo
(2015: 925) suggests that these images display the activists’ desire to renounce their
also observes this desire in her analysis of image based activism. She (2017:51) feels that
“image based activism via snapshots, avatars, and selfies not only has the power to bend
the rules that have historically defined and determined political organization’s purpose or
direction, but to also construct new collective, political, and protest identities on social media.” These findings indicate that avatars are signs and symbols that can reflect the collective identity of the movement, in that they make the personal identity of the individual less present and less relevant in the post. They also suggest that images, when used for the purposes of activism, have the ability to shape, change and create new versions of activist and social movement identities.

In order to paint an accurate picture of this literature it is also important to note that there are those who feel that the visual images protesters use in their profiles and in their posts are not consistently understood as being evidence of collective identity. There are some like Bakardjeiva (2009) that posit that changing profile pictures should be considered a form of “subactivism,” in that it has the potential to inspire activism, but on its own does little for the collective movement. It is a kind of action that sits on the lower rung of the “ladder” of activist engagement (Khoo 2013; Penney 2015), in that it does not require much of the individual. These images are also not always universally understood as a form of collective identity and therefore, have inconsistent impact on those who are accessing the content. Fominaya provides the example of the Guy Fawkes mask to explain just how unreliable these markers can be. “The now iconic Guy Fawkes mask that is seen as the symbol of ‘Anonymous,’” she explains, “was originally used to represent ‘epic fail guy,’ a meme that represented not a ‘we are legion awesomeness’ but rather the guy who was doomed to failure” (Fominaya 2018: 431). Therefore, the locus of collective identity is not in the images themselves but in how the images are contextualized through the online identity curation practices developed by the individual and the movement.
The literature on identity curation builds upon Gerbaudo’s (2015) and Kasra’s (2017) findings by identifying images as being only part of the collective identity process in online mobilization. Identity curation involves altering, tweaking and strategically disseminating information online. McCreery et al. (2012) explain that the process of identity curation is influenced by perceptions of online and offline identity, as there is a feedback loop that exists between the two and individuals use this feedback to alter or tweak identity in one or both realms. Researchers find that curation practices lead individuals to treat Facebook profiles as extensions of themselves, since they can selectively share personal information in emotionally significant ways (Taylor, Falconer and Snowden 2014). In their study of religious queer youth on Facebook, Taylor et al. (2014) found that their respondents managed their stigmatized identities at both ends of the coming out process through careful curation of the information and content they posted online. Their management of their identities online was crucial to the interactions and relationships had offline and vice versa. In cases such as this, it is through “the combination of textual and ‘pictorial’ comment exchanges, that the friends experience and perform their embodied affection for one another” (Van Doorn 2011: 535).

Embodiment, as a result, is not just a process of representation but also collective storytelling, engagement and the development of relationships. Therefore, users of social media sites are curating their identities through the production of visual and textual content in order to construct embodied representations and interactions.

This concept of digital construction of embodiment is supported by the work of Niels Van Doorn (2011), who asserts that embodiment is about meaning-making and that meaning is not only contained within aspects of the physical body, rather it is an
amalgamation of the physical body, actions, identities and interactions, which can better be displayed in narrative form. It is for this reason, he argues, that the Internet serves as a preferred venue for embodiment and embodied practices since it allows people to extend their actions, identities, and narratives beyond that of their personal area of influence. Ferreday (2017) found this to be the case in her analysis of posts from survivors of rapes and sexual harassment. These individuals post narratives of their experiences and images of themselves in order to protest the stigma associated with the violated female body. Ferreday (2017: 130) argues that this tactic of combining selfies with narratives serves the purpose of resisting the “dominant narratives of victimhood and survivorhood” that pervade rape/sexual harassment discourse (for other examples of the use of this tactic, see Beach 2017 and Morrissey and Kimball 2017). Kasra (2017) arrives at similar conclusions in her analysis of feminist images that feature nudity as a means of political expression. She finds that through these images, the activists are both re-claiming their bodies and constructing political subjectivities. The captions or narratives that accompany the images provide an additional layer of context that the individual has control over, as the words inform how they would like their images to be perceived. Despite the apparent utility of this tactic for online mobilization, these findings are often directly tied to politics of the physical body. As mentioned before, the grievances and goals of two movements discussed below have little to do with the physical body, therefore, further analysis of how other types of online mobilizations combine images and narratives is necessary in order to better understand how embodiment is constructed in digital space.
Altogether, this literature paints a somewhat inconsistent picture of the relationship between the body and activism. It also suggests a variety of divisive ideas about what it means to be embodied in digital space. When applied to analysis of online content, the theories of Merleau-Ponty (2012) and Young (2005) suggest that the body will adapt to the digital contexts that it experiences. As this research shows, activists are attempting to adapt to digital contexts by creating new methods of representation and consequently, new forms of identity. In my analysis of the Occupy and Swan Queen movements, I find that the digital “situation” in which activism is performed facilitates an intermingling of body, image, and narrative, which together lead to the digital construction of embodiment.

**Digital Construction of Embodiment**

Digital embodied practices force an examination of embodiment to include images, which are conventionally regarded as representation and narratives, which are conventionally treated as separate from images. As mentioned above, the themes in these activist images are (1) avatars, (2) partial selfies and (3) selfies. Each theme depicts a different relationship between the body and the narrative, the individual and the movement, and the offline and online identities of the individual. Analysis of each also suggests that the posts serve as extensions of the self into digital settings. For each theme, images will be provided that display examples of the theme and how prominent the theme is in each movement. Throughout the discourse, I found that 1,546 Occupy posts and 723
of the Swan Queen posts featured images that fit into the categories of (1) avatars, (2) partial selfies and (3) selfies.10

**The Avatar**

For both movements, the posts that include avatars are the most obviously constructed. The activist has chosen which images, which aspects of those images to emphasize and what the images show, or in many cases, say. In the avatars, activists are also taking on the image of a physical body that, while not their own, is meant to represent their identity. In contrast to Gerbaudo’s (2015) findings, the images are not memetic per se. Some aspects of the images have memetic qualities, such as the fact that they include hashtags and recognizable iconic images, but the avatars are more likely to be personalized. In other words, there is not a uniform avatar that is consistently used by the activists; rather the activists use a variety of avatars.

In the Occupy posts, the images that serve as avatars take on a variety of forms. Figure 7 provides a representative sample of these forms. The most common theme throughout these avatars is the presence of words. In many of these images, the words and phrases provided elucidate upon the plight of the 99%. These images, which are intended to represent the individual activist, instead focuses on and frames words and images associated with the collective. As seen in the image on the top left corner, the reference to the 99% is accompanied by caricatures of individuals who belong to this

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10 For the Occupy movement, there were 287 avatars (18.5%), 610 partial selfies (39.5%), 649 selfies (41.9%). For the Swan Queen movement, there were 245 avatars (33.9%), 93 partial selfies (12.9%) 385 selfies (53.2%) An intercoder reliability test was conducted. The test resulted in 93.75% accuracy, suggesting that the coding scheme and development of the categories is an accurate reflection of the images and how they can be distinguished from each other. For each movement the categories range from least prominent (avatars) to most prominent (selfies). I used a small selection from each category in order to provide a closer analysis of the images.
collective. The image in the top left is a comic that is meant to depict the plight of the collective. The image below this on the right is also a common form of avatar found in this discourse: avatars that connect these activists to other movements.

Though the presence of a physical body is implied by the fact that an individual is present in the image, the Guy Fawkes mask itself and the written message that they are holding obscures the presence of the physical body completely anonymizing the individual. This complete disconnection from the individual activist and their identity is why this image qualifies as an avatar instead of a partial selfie. The Guy Fawkes mask is imagery that largely took on the mimetic function that Gerbaudo (2015) refers too. Despite its previous incarnations, the image of Guy Fawkes in this context is associated with a series of contentious events that span from the Gunpowder Plot in England in 1605 (House of Commons Information Office 2006) and the fact that this image has been appropriated as the face of the hacker movement Anonymous. This is not to mention the fact that Anonymous’ use of this mask was inspired by the comic book and later film *V for Vendetta.*

Therefore, the mask is a layered referent that complicates and obscures the relationship between offline and online. The mask is a representation of a figure in history known for offline contention, that has been stylized in popular culture, then adopted by an online social movement to be worn in offline protests and in the images created for online activist purposes. Therefore, this mask may provide anonymity, but it is not an anonymity that completely obscures identity. In fact, it speaks to the social and cultural contexts in which the individual is embedded.

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11 The plot of the comic book and film surrounds the actions of a vigilante in the United Kingdom, whose mission is to bring down the government. This vigilante wears a mask that is a stylized illustration of Guy Fawkes’ face.
Anonymity is the most consistent similarity between the images in this category. The relative absence of the physical body indicates that the narrative or phrases associated with the movement take precedence in their representation. In these posts, the individual activist is made visually absent, but textually present. Their physical bodies do not play a role in their online identity construction. Rather, the emphasis here is placed on the symbols and text.

This is also the case in the avatar images of the Swan Queen discourse. A representative sample of these images can be seen in Figure 8. As seen in the image towards the bottom, people within these movements present themselves as avatars that are similar to those found in gaming culture. Specifically, this image is a still shot of an avatar from Second Life, an online universe that allows people to create avatars and interact in a wide range of digital spaces. However, this is not the most common type of avatar found in this discourse. Rather, the most common types of avatars are those that explicitly connect the individual to the *Once Upon a Time* television show and to the Swan Queen fandom.

The use of avatars that connect activists to the television program and fandom complicates the images relationship between offline and online, not to mention the relationship between political and popular culture. The television program occupies both the offline and online realms, in that it is an offline media that frequently is consumed via online technologies. Also, the ways in which members of fandoms and members of this movement experience media and engage with media is primarily in online environments. There is no sense of an offline component of this movement. The use of the stills encourages the viewer to reconsider the dynamics of the characters in the program. These
images represent moments in the show where both members of the fandom and the movement clearly see the connection and chemistry between the two characters. The images are not manufactured; instead, they are taken directly from the program’s content, hinting to the veracity of the claims made by Swan Queen activists. The other common type of avatar is represented by the images to the left of Figure 8. These images are commonly associated with the movement. In fact, the image of the swan with a crown on it is the symbol of the Swan Queen ship.

In these avatars, many activists are utilizing bodies that are not their own in order to represent themselves and establish connection to the movement. In all images, save the one that contains the graphical avatar, the collective and the bodies deemed most meaningful to the collective (those of the two characters that inspired the movement) serve as a form of representation that renders the individual invisible. However, the presence of the individual is made clear in the composition of the image. The stills are altered so that they reflect the stories and beliefs of the individual activist. The stills are further contextualized as belonging to the movement through the use of hashtags. Though the hashtags alone would not be enough to establish connection to the movement, the juxtaposition of the hashtag over the image solidifies the connection between these textual and visual identifiers.

The most common theme throughout the posts from both movements is the complete anonymity of the individual and the prominence of words within or directly next to the image. Under ordinary circumstances, the anonymity of the posts could be interpreted as the individuals’ desire to distance themselves from the experience of posting. However, the presence of the movement symbols and textual content ties these
images, and therefore the individual activist to the collective. As a result, the avatars are images that most clearly represent activist intentions and movement goals. The construction of embodiment in this category, then, relies heavily upon representation that reflects collective intention and representation. The activists are embodying the movement more so than their personal identities and experiences. The collective intentions and representations of the movement are less clear in the partial selfies.

**The Partial Selfie**

The partial selfie is not a term used in selfie literature. Here, I am using it to describe images taken by individuals that contain a specific part of the self or reveal only a select portion of the self that excludes an individual’s full countenance. Therefore, any image where an individual’s face is partially hidden but still included in the frame.

For those posting in the #Wearethe99% blog, this category involves images that are predominantly narrative focused. In all of the images in Figure 9, the written narrative takes center stage while only a portion of the person’s physical body is visible. The portion of the body that can be seen, whether it be a hand, foot or other parts of a body, are purposeful attempts to position the self alongside the various ideological frames that influence the movement, which are made visible in the textual discourse provided. According to Wargo (2017), these types of selfies are object-oriented in that the focus of the image is on something rather than someone. He argues that in these types of images the inclusion or exclusion of an object is reflective of a strategic choice made by the individual, often for aesthetic purposes. However, in these images, the strategic choices made are those regarding inclusion or exclusion of the body. Unlike the avatars that provide complete anonymity, these images only provide relative anonymity in that they
reveal certain aspects of the physical body. This signals the desire to physically contextualize and in some cases physically frame the discourse. As a result, the visual relationship between the offline self and the online self is less about identity specificity as it is about identity generalized. The individual activists are in physical spaces of their choosing holding narratives that feature specific aspects of their personal identity, yet they could be anyone and anywhere.

This is identity generalization is also apparent in the partial selfies of the Swan Queen discourse. Representative samples can be found in Figure 10. The partial selfies within this movement are altogether far more playful. In terms of anonymity, they reveal parts of the body but not enough to make a positive identification. The Swan Queen movement has constructed a variety of strategies for maintaining relative anonymity, such as posting images of shadows, the back of the head, part of the head or images where an object obscures the body of the individual. Unlike the Occupy discourse, however, the objects generally are not those that directly tie the individual to the movement. They are a phone, a drink and in some cases, something edible. There are some images, however, that have taken on a format similar to that of Occupy as seen in the center of Figure 10. The narratives that accompany these kinds of selfies reflect concerns about (1) physical appearance or (2) revealing who the person is in real life. The latter concern stems back to the standard convention in fandom of maintaining anonymity in fan spaces. However, the commitment of the majority of the individuals to forge stronger ties between their offline identity and their online identity is a testament to the fact that the visual discourse is composed of more selfies than partial selfies. Analysis of
this visual discourse would not be complete without some acknowledgment that a small population of this movement still has concerns about revealing their identities online.

In the partial selfie, both the body and the individual play a more prominent role in representation. The construction of embodiment in this case places more significance upon creating a tie between offline physicality and online identity, which can be interpreted as a claim to offline existence beyond the online realm. In this construction, a portion of the body is included in order to establish physical weight and presence in addition to the narratives or objects that are provided. Therefore, this construction of embodiment relies upon both evidence of physicality and the articulation of collective belonging and insists that both internal and external aspects of the phenomenal self be present when participating in online mobilization.

The use of the partial selfie in both movements seems to be a reflection of the relative ideological concerns of the movements. For Occupy, the individuals who post these narratives are taking their cue from the framing of the first narrative posted by Patricia Grimm. The relative anonymity of the images was meant to reflect the possibility that the individual in the image could be anyone. This strategy was ultimately meant to symbolize the large-scale constituency of the movement visually. In the case of the Swan Queen movement, however, the framing of the partial selfie was not as widely disseminated or encouraged. The movement itself was ideologically committed to revealing personal identity in order to humanize the movement and the fandom it derived from. This ideological connection to the movement is more evident in the selfie images.
The Selfie

One aspect of selfies that often gets overlooked in the literature is the “gaze” of the individual in the image. This gaze is seldom referenced and is commonly taken for granted as a fundamental and fairly obvious component of the typical selfie. What keeps these images from being taken seriously is that they are “frequently featured in the public imagination not as sites of control but as places where control is lost” (Senft and Baym 2015: 1594). This is because selfies are often seen as impulsive and perhaps reckless when in reality these are images that are highly controlled and also policed by others (Senft and Baym 2015). Tourism literature, on the other hand, delves into the significance of the “selfie gaze” in travel photography. Researchers argue that the purpose of this gaze in travel photography is to convey a lifestyle and raise the status of the individual in the image (Magasic 2016). This concept of the “selfie gaze” can and should be applied to cases of contentious action that involve selfies. These selfies also convey a particular lifestyle and ideology while at the same time signifying the status of the image as different from the typical selfie. As will be displayed below, this gaze is consistent but contextual for both movements.

The posts on the #Wearethe99% Tumblr feature many of the most difficult and troublesome aspects of activists’ lives. Revealing the full extent and details surrounding struggles and hardships goes against the more common conventions of social media sharing that advocate accentuating or embellishing the positive aspects of lived experiences (Chou and Edge 2012). The emphasis upon detailing hardship and grievances about the United States reveals the extent to which individuals feel that they lack power in their everyday lives. Many of the narratives, as seen in Figure 11, feature strong
critiques of the country and the fact that they as individuals did all that they needed to do to succeed and thrive; yet they continue to struggle. The images and narratives are strategic attempts to take some of the control back, even if it is just control over their own stories and identities. The anonymity of the post is violated in order for the individual to stare out from behind the story they hold. The stare is confrontational and serves as the focal point of the image, forcing the onlooker to lock eyes with the individual in whatever time and place the image is being viewed. The gaze, then serves as a reflection of the movement, establishing the individual and the movement as legitimate, since the images and narratives in them establish proof of their existence. The framing of this image is more akin to visuals that one might see in physical sites of protest, which are protesters holding signs conveying grievances and slogans associated with the movement. The relationship between the body and the narrative is such that the body of the individual draws the focus of the viewer, while the narratives, which are often difficult to read in the images themselves is placed alongside the individual. Here the representation of the individual takes precedence over representation of the movement or their connection to it.

Analysis of the images from the Swan Queen movement suggests that selfie activism and how the images are framed reflect the context of the specific movement and their grievances. The “selfie gaze” for this movement was meant to challenge viewers in different ways. This gaze, as seen in Figure 12, serves as a reflection of the overall purposes of the movement, which were to establish equality within the fandom and promote the importance/normality of LGBTQ romances. As a result, the gaze is still confrontational in that it forces eye contact, but is also friendly and welcoming. As mentioned earlier, revealing true identity in fandom is thought to be a taboo act. In these
selfies, however, members of the movement are revealing who they truly are and detailed information about their lives, such as age, name, hometown, etc. The use of the tactic of selfie activism, then, is a significant departure of fan activity. The manufacturing of the images and the identity within the narrative serves the purposes of both establishing the fan as an activist and establishing the movement as a legitimate social justice collective.

The use of selfies is widespread in both movements. However, the framing of these images differ in two dominant areas (1) their relationship to textual content and (2) the emotions conveyed on the faces of the activists. In the Occupy movement, the narratives continue to be featured prominently in the images. Unlike partial selfies, however, the narratives do not obscure the facial features of the individual. These individuals place themselves alongside the narratives, which reflects a different dynamic and relationship with the text. In this way, these images are far more personalized. In the Swan Queen movement, the text associated with the post is both above and below the images. The text above will often feature a hashtag or a phrase from the movement, but the elucidation of the individuals’ experiences are most often found below the image. On their own, the images would fall into the category of the more conventional selfie. The inclusion, of text, however limited, still contextualizes the posts as a part of the movement. Furthermore, the respective ethos of the movements is made visible in the expressions of the individual posters. This indicates that there are no uniform activist posts or selfies and they will vary both compositionally and contextually based on the digital “situation” of the movement and its cause.

The construction of embodiment in this form of representation is more akin to the embodiment that individuals establish in their social media profile, this is especially the
case for the Swan Queen movement, as evidence of collective belonging is absent from the visual representation. In this form there is more emphasis placed on establishing the physicality of the individual and their offline identity undeniable in their online engagement.

**Discussion: Digital Construction of Embodiment: Anonymity or Identity?**

One of the potential stumbling blocks when thinking of these images as forms of embodiment is that many of the activists are maintaining their anonymity. This is seen in the images that feature (1) avatars and (2) partial selfies. If analyzed through the lens of literature on the Internet and disembodiment, it could be argued that the anonymity of the images serves as a means of disconnecting from consistent identity practices. Many websites allow people to remain anonymous when posting content online; Tumblr is no different. Studies suggest that when conducting activities anonymously, people are more likely to engage in trolling (Scott 2018), cyberbullying (Sanchez 2016) or Internet crime (Sankhwar, Pandey and Khan 2018). However, the purposes of anonymity for members of the Occupy movement and the Swan Queen movement detract significantly from the more widely known purposes of anonymity online.

In these movements, identity is variously constructed to reflect the activists’ personal orientations to the movement and personal issues with revealing physical aspects of their identity. The images where the personal physical body of the individual are least present are in actuality those visual representations where the collective identity of the movements are more apparent. It is important to note, however, that these images are only one category of representation and not even the most popular. Conventional social movement constructions of collective identity would suggest that activists would
more consistently produce these kinds of images to establish the legitimacy of the cause. However, as internet and communications technology literature argues, anonymity may be a sign of less connection and less legitimacy. Therefore, in online movements personal identity and connection to the physical body is a more significant sign of connection to the movement. The activists are placing their offline consistent identities at stake for their online activism.

As Phillips (2012) claimed, images are manipulated in order to produce the “truth” of the individuals who are creating/ are represented in the images. Therefore, for the activists in these movements, the truth proves to be highly contextual and involves a strategic choice to cover or reveal aspects of the individuals’ true form. Images that depict or reveal the physical body in some way, represent both of Biocca’s (1997) concepts of the “phenomenal body” and the “internal model of the self.” The images themselves do not always reflect the “internal model”, but the narratives that they are paired with often do.

The images that contain avatars are evoking a construction of embodiment that is more closely related to embodied politics as the individuals literally visually identify with the movement and its cause. The “partial selfie” includes the individual’s presence but in selective ways. As the findings show, the composition of the “partial selfie” is largely dependent upon the ideological perspectives of the movement. In these posts, the symbols of the collective are less evident; therefore, connection to the movement and its collective identity must be further contextualized by the textual discourse. This is especially the case within activist “selfies.” In these images, the symbols of the movement are generally
absent, and the body of the individual is most evident. In these cases, the ethos of the movement is framed in the gaze of the activist.

These images and the narratives they contain are forms of constructed embodiment, in that they are constructed versions of the self made available for online consumption. Each of these forms accounts for different conceptions of embodiment, where avatars are used in order to embody the movement, partial selfies are avatars used to embody both the movement and the individual and selfies focus on embodying external identity. These forms also account for various interpretations of what constitutes presence in digital space, with avatars establishing presence through embeddedness within online content, images and conventions and selfies establishing presence through representation of the physical self in digital space. These three forms of visual representation are the second common characteristic of online social movement hybrid identity. Hybrid identities allow for various visual constructions of the offline and online self. In these identities, the avatars and partial selfies are both forms of personalized anonymity. Therefore, it is not a question of anonymity or identity; in online movements both are commonly present in activist posts. The combination of anonymous imagery with personal information changes the associated risk of posting this content, but in no way discounts the activists’ contribution to the movement. Activists within online movements recognize that visual representation is a personizable aspect of their engagement.

By revealing only portions of themselves visually and linguistically, the activists are controlling how they are seen and also how they wish to be understood. Therefore, the movements also reflect current conventions in body image discourse, which enforces
fluidity and choice in representation. When it comes to online mobilization, the question should not be whether or not the politics are embodied, but rather how are we defining our bodies and our identities? The findings force a reconsideration of which types of bodies are thought to be political – the digitally constructed body (whether it be composed of depictions of an activist’s actual physical body images of bodies that are not their own) can serve as a platform of political dissent and political meaning making.

The visual discourses of these movements also suggest that there is a visual model of contention on social media, Tumblr specifically. This model encourages the depiction of the individual or the symbolic representation of that individual with or next to a narrative that explains their connection to the movement. This model provides a relatively fluid format that can be adapted by movements of all types. The framing of the images and the content that is included are entirely up to the discretion of the individual who is choosing to post content. Overall, this suggests that there is an informally established format for online contention that is disseminated through social media channels. The collection and visual aggregation of protest images provide a visual of collective contention not so dissimilar from the visual of a group of protesters gathered together to march for a cause. The significant difference between the two is that online embodiment carries with it a sense of permanence. It is an asynchronous representation of belonging that continues to be visible and findable long after the movement is over.
Chapter 5: Challenging Roles in Dominant Narrative Structures: The Negotiation of Narratives and the “Anti-Story”

Narratives are one of the primary ways that activists articulate their understanding of the world, their place in it, and the changes they want for it (Owens 2009). At least this is the conclusion commonly arrived at after analyzing the offline narratives produced by activists. This observation, however, can be applied to online narratives as well. In fact, for a significant number of current online social movements and social justice campaigns, narratives serve as a primary form of activist engagement and representation (Creech 2014). Yet, the literature on activist narratives (or contentious narratives) is dominated by findings and theories derived from the narratives of well-established offline social movements and social justice campaigns (Davis 2002; Owens 2009). Within these movements, activists develop and share stories at meetings, marches and rallies. These narratives serve a variety of purposes, such as establishing solidarity and collective identity, developing tactics and courses of action (Davis 2002), explaining movement processes and successes (Polletta 2006) and even reinvigorating or re-mobilizing a movement (Beckwith 2015). Online contentious narratives are not often shared in those venues and do not serve those purposes. Therefore, analysis of online contentious narratives is needed, as it will further our understanding of the concerns of the current generation of activists and how these concerns are translated in their contentious narratives and shape the patterns of contentious narrative development.

To this end, I analyze the popular narrative campaigns of the Occupy and Swan Queen movements: the #Wearethe99% narrative campaign for Occupy Wall Street Movement and the #BelieveinSwanQueen campaign for the Swan Queen Movement.
Both movements developed communities and repositories of contentious narratives on Tumblr that follow similar narrative patterns and strategies. This was generally unexpected considering that the cause and the societal perceptions of the movements differ drastically. The differences between these movements contribute to this research because they indicate that online social movement collectives may differ drastically in their cause and perceived legitimacy, yet their contentious discourses can feature remarkably similar themes. In other words, certain online activist tactics are being established as a contentious format that can be applied to a variety of causes.

The most consistent pattern throughout the online contentious narratives is that participants are often navigating the intersection of two different storylines: the dominant metanarratives that pervade the ideologies of their respective cultural spheres and the story of their personal lives. Contentious storytelling online involves elements of personalization that may obscure the collective intentions of the movement as the narratives appear to be more “I” than “we” focused, yet these narratives display shared strategies of storytelling that speak to collective negotiation of metanarratives. Narratives are considered “meta,” when they “structure many specific narratives, both fictional and nonfictional” (Shumway 2014). Metanarratives become pervasive in various discourses due to the overall applicability of the narrative skeleton to a wide variety of more specific stories. Contentious narratives, as a result, often feature many of the widely recognized aspects of fictional narratives; they have plots, villains and heroes (Jasper et al. 2018). Even so, very little attention is paid to the role that metanarratives play in the narratives of activists. Francesca Polletta (1998: 424) provides one notable exception in her discussion of narrative “canon,” or dominant ideological narratives. She suggests that one
of the most important things to consider when assessing movement narratives is that narratives often derive from a “limited stock” of story lines. This limited stock is composed of stories passed down through the hierarchical system being targeted. These stories are capable of constraining the strategies, ideas and concerns of the movement and as a result, they have a significant impact on how activists are telling their stories.

These constraints leave little room for the development of personal narratives within activist contexts. The personal narrative is often treated as a separate genre of stories complete with forms and structures unique to that genre (Reissman 2005). Despite the narrative turn in social research, which led to a plethora of new studies and approaches to narratives (Goodson and Gill 2011), there are still those that question the utility of personalized narratives for activism and social movements (Milan 2015). Analysis of online social justice discourses, however, suggests that the metanarratives that they are negotiating are serving as the foundation for narrating collective societal grievances through the development of personal narratives.

The metanarratives negotiated throughout the discourses are “the American Dream,” as in the ideological promise of American opportunity for Occupy and “Once Upon a Time,” as in the “happy ending” heteronormative plot structure of most fairy tales and fairy tale reproductions for Swan Queen. The narrative of the American Dream became the target of contention for the activists participating in the Occupy Movement because it reflects an ideal of economic prosperity that the individuals believe they no longer have access to / may never achieve. For the Swan Queen movement, the metanarrative of “Once Upon a Time” is a reflection of the literal canon (or scripting) of the television program *Once Upon a Time* and the broader heteronormative plots that
dictate romantic relationships and set expectations for “happy endings” in fairy tales and who has access to them. I find that activists in these movements develop “re-claiming” and “rejection” narrative strategies that allow activists to contextualize their goals, grievances and identities.

When taken together, these strategies result in the construction of an “anti-story,” a form of storytelling utilized online because it serves the dual purposes of allowing people to delve into their individual circumstances, while at the same time allowing them to call into question the collective plots associated with metanarratives. In other words, these activists are personalizing collective social justice narratives through the negotiation of metanarratives. The “anti-story” is another tenet of hybrid identity and it is essentially a hybrid narrative composed of multiple storylines with a variety of social and cultural contexts. This concept is derived from the “antenarrative,” which is a concept predominantly addressed in communications and management literature. It is a type of narrative meant to disrupt meaning more so than produce meaning (Jones, Moore and Walton 2016). These narratives are not meant to produce interpretative frames, rather they serve as platforms for the unfolding of experience that has yet to be fully interpreted or plotted carefully according to our conventional understanding of narrative structure (Boje 2001). The “anti-story” that I am proposing, is therefore, a derivative of this type of narrative. Activism has taken an antenarrative turn, where status quo narratives are viewed with skepticism. This does not mean that the narratives are devoid of collective meaning or collective identity, but rather that they are formulated according to a new set of activist strategies for developing identity.
Narrating Contention: Past and Present

In her analysis of activist narratives, Francesca Polletta (2006: 8) states that narratives, like all stories really, are “socially patterned”. They are shaped by the context of the movement, the time at which these movements are developing and the people in these movements. The social patterning of stories is significant because “concerns about stories’ credibility and authority are more likely to be engaged in some settings than others and with more respect to some storytellers than others” (Polletta 2006: 8).

Therefore, the context in which a story is told lends to its legitimacy or illegitimacy. The digital contexts of the social movements and the narratives they create will inform how online contentious narratives are perceived and analyzed. As I will explain below, the interpretation of these digital contexts is informed by perceptions of offline social movement contexts that establish narratives as more or less legitimate according to their offline impact and shared collective themes. The following will provide an overview of contentious narratives and their utility in activism from offline to online.

After the “narrative turn” in social sciences, researchers started to investigate how elements of fictional storytelling, such as plot and characterization, influence the meaning making practices of people in their day-to-day lives (Riessman 2005; Jasper et al. 2018). These narrative devices proved to be particularly significant when it came to rationalizing group behavior, like when activists engage in acts of protest and social movement organization. Activists would rationalize their behavior by plotting their own narratives according to widely recognizable storylines. According to Fine (1995: 135), the plots most commonly employed by activists are: (1) “horror stories,” detailing how a person has been made a victim by those forces being targeted, (2) “war stories,” detailing the
experiences of the community fighting for the cause and (3) “happy endings,” detailing the values of the movement and how they can potentially lead to a better tomorrow. The use of these plots makes it possible for activists to connect events that they have experienced to historically relevant events and also make sense of any new experiences that they believe are unique to their movement. Plotting narratives in this way ensures that activists are able to translate their cause into language that the media, potential supporters and other activists can understand.

Activists are best able to translate these plots and the meaning behind them when they create vivid and successful characterizations of the parties involved in the social justice issue. They commonly do this by assigning the roles of hero, villain, victim and minion. For example, activists often depict themselves as the heroes of their stories, where their purpose is to serve as a positive source of change for those who are suffering at the hands of villains (Jasper et al. 2018). This makes the narratives more compelling, relatable and morally influential. Jasper et al. (2018: 115) suggest that stories that lack such characterization “tend to fall flat,” meaning they do not have the emotional or political impact that they intend to. This is especially the case when a narrative lacks a definable enemy. The “blaming villain strategy” only works when it is “attached to human, not to nature or God” (Jasper et al. 2018: 119). Without the attachment to a human entity, the movement is unable to form tangible targets and a tangible collective narrative that inspires others to join or support the movement.

The development of successful collective narratives was an essential component of many past social movements. In her analysis of the Civil Rights Movement, Polletta found that activists told stories in specific ways to further motivate themselves and to
produce an inspiring image of the movement to those who may be following its progress. One way that the activists did this was by portraying their protest events as almost entirely spontaneous. They intentionally left out many of the details about planning and organizing meetings to create suspense and the sense that protests emerged as if “from the head of Zeus” (Polletta 2006: 33). She describes these narrative devices as both intentional and organic. They are intentional in that they are meant to highlight the most action-oriented aspects of organization, such as sit-ins or protest, without revealing the work behind those events. They are organic in that once narratives were told in this way, others were encouraged to follow suit. Narrative structure, therefore, disseminates through activist collectives, which is also true of the Occupy and Swan Queen discourses as well.

The observations above are based on analysis of offline movement narratives, the majority of which were developed out of collective strategies and shared with the intention of promoting the cause of the collective to a wider audience. Though there are still vestiges of the narratives devices above in activist discourses, the narratives developed and shared on digital platforms reveal that narratives are much less explicitly collective than they have been in past movements. As a result, the narratives often vary in tone, lack consistent characterization (as there is little consensus as to whom the primary villains are) and they do not display any desire for suspense and spontaneity as the majority of interactions (organizing, planning, etc.) can be easily found online. Contentious digital narratives contain many uniquely personal aspects of the individual activists. The personalization of these narratives often obscures the collective intentions.
Researchers find that Internet technology and social media specifically cultivate an environment that encourages personalization (For more on personalization of digital narratives, see Bennett 2012; Vivienne and Burgess 2012). One of the reasons for this is because users of online tools believe that they are more egalitarian and democratic (Couldry 2008; Dimond et al. 2013). These tools remove several structural impediments that generally deter the sharing of personal information and details in conventional group settings. For example, stories about sensitive topics, like abortion, are more likely to be shared online because there is not a consistent face-to-face public forum where these kinds of stories are accepted (Allen 2014). In these online forums, people share intimate and sometimes sensitive details about their experiences and their nuanced feelings they have about them. Therefore, they are using the digital forums to personalize and contextualize their experiences, while also reaching out to and communicating with a much larger audience than they would normally have access to.

This personalization of digital content also extends to contentious narratives. In digital settings, these narratives appear to be primarily personal, yet they often contain political and collective content as well. They do not feature many of the distinct tenants of personal narratives identified by researchers, such as detailed explanations and analysis that usually require a relationship between the audience (or researcher) and the individual who is sharing the narrative (Riessman 2005). Instead, they feature depictions of people’s lives tied to their engagement in a collective social justice campaign. Analysis

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12 It is also worth mentioning that the existence of countless forums for online communication does not mean that all content is universally accepted. As discussed in the case overview, Swan Queen was often the target of abuse due to the extent to which they shared narratives and content. Other collectives, such as those composed of women and/or people of color are also frequently targets of abuse because of the online content they share (Hollis 2016).
of these kinds of narratives is imperative in order to decipher the contemporary connections established between the personal and political. Some researchers, however, exhibit hesitance in deeming these narratives significant and legitimate. They seem to echo the warning that Reissman issues at the end of her piece on narrative analysis: “there is a real danger of over-personalizing the personal narrative” (Riessman 2005: 6).

Stefania Milan’s critique of personalized narratives in online movements suggests just this. Milan argues that the sharing of personalized narratives alone does not qualify as legitimate activism. In discussion of the Occupy Wall Street Movement, she notes that many individuals took part in the movement to help build the “collective plot” (Milan 2015: 894). This plot, however, did not become a significant movement building tool as was the case in past movements and she suggests that the reason for this is because the plot was so highly customized and customizable that it was stripped of any unifying potential. In other words, people are over-personalizing the collective narrative.

According to this logic, the desire to personalize social movements will negatively impact the movements in general, destabilize solidarity and impede the development of any lasting collective identity.

The implication here is that the only collective element of these narratives is the fact that they are being written by a large number of individuals and that the collection of personal narratives stands as a paltry proxy for collective identity and legitimate movement engagement. This is similar to claims made by Ruth Milkman. Milkman (2014) is hesitant to label the activists who contribute to the #Wearethe99% blog storytellers, let alone activists, since their overarching goals included few, if any, specific policy-oriented grievances. The implication here is that it is not worthwhile to analyze the
content of individual narratives when generalized claims can be drawn from the body of
narratives. Milkman supports her contention by comparing the Occupy discourse to that
of the Dreamers.\footnote{“Dreamers” is the chosen name of the population of undocumented immigrants who support and
fight for the DREAM Act, which is short for the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors
Act. This act would grant legal status to a number of individuals who were brought into this country as
children.} The Dreamers, according to her observations, use storytelling
extensively to build the base of and support their movement, while Occupy activists focus
on the main public narrative of class inequality and the injustices of the “1%.” In other
words, the Occupiers are not storytellers because they are simply retelling the already
established narrative of the movement instead of developing their own stories.

This work and others like it do not consider that there are thematic commonalities
in these narratives beyond where they are shared and why. Close analysis of the
narratives from this movement suggests that the narrative constructs used to create
meaningful connection to the collective are more nuanced than the standard narrative of
the 99% and income inequality. The contentious narratives of Occupiers and other similar
movements bear the hallmarks of the antenarrative. Therefore, these stories often appear
to be “fragmented, non-linear, collective, unplotted, and improper storytelling” (Boje
2001), but storytelling nonetheless. Other narratives, like those discussed above, are
typically stable and follow a clear path. Boje (2001) indicates that the antenarrative is
common within organizations that are attempting to make sense of previously
unexperienced circumstances. The content in the antenarrative is an often disjointed
reflection of that process. The privileging of more stable stories results in an
unwillingness to examine those stories that are less stable and less structured. I believe
that this is the primary reason why the narratives of the Occupy movement and the Swan
Queen movement have not been subject to discourse analysis. Though the narratives of both these movements share features of antenarrative, they are not completely devoid of the presence of plot. However, instead of engaging with plot as means of establishing the trajectory of their movement, these activists are negotiating the plot of metanarratives as a process of collective meaning making.

**Negotiating Metanarratives and Developing the “Anti-story”**

Metanarratives are common throughout most discourses. They influence narrative structure, characterization and plot. According to Englund and Leach (2000:226) metanarratives are also sets of “organizing assumptions.” This suggests that metanarratives are capable of shaping expectations. In Englund and Leach’s analysis (2000), this was proven by the fact that many people who read a story can often conclude how it ends and why. People have become accustomed to the assumptions that are associated with a number of common plots. In the narratives from both movements below, the activists show that metanarratives are also capable of structuring assumptions and expectations that people have about their own lives and experiences. These metanarratives and their perceived implications similarly inform the meaning making practices of Occupy and Swan Queen.

The metanarrative of the “American Dream” plays a prominent role in the discourse of Occupy Wall Street. In his analysis of the American Dream, Hauhart (2015) describes the American Dream as a consequential narrative in American life since the settling of the original colonies. Coming to America was associated with self-interest, individualism and financial opportunity. Horatio Alger’s “rags to riches” novels further substantiated this narrative. In Alger’s stories, young poor boys were depicted as hard
workers and they became successful despite their circumstances. This type of plot seemed to capture the spirit of American individualism and the metanarrative was used as a popular vehicle for countless other stories. From this point forward, the dream was “so widely used that it has become a powerful metaphor of core American values” and “mandates that all these values can be accomplished through hard work and individual effort” (Schneiderman 2012: ix). The image often associated with the benefits of this hard work and individual effort is a house (usually in the suburbs) with a picket fence and a family with 2.5 kids and some sort of pet (usually a dog). Therefore, this image also presents an idealized happy ending that hard work supposedly begets. According to Samuel (2012), this image is not only iconic, but also unyielding and has pervaded all types of media and discourses for decades. It pervades the Occupy Wall Street discourse as well. The American Dream is the basis upon which activists develop their anti-stories, express their grievances and display frustration about the expectations that they had for their own lives.

The metanarrative that the Swan Queen movement navigates is another kind of happy ending. This metanarrative is “Once Upon a Time.” Due to the fact that this movement very literally was inspired by alternative interpretations of narrative plots, this metanarrative is shaped by two separate but interlocking sources: (1) the television program “Once Upon a Time” and (2) the conventionally mediated plots of fairy tales. The former source is a contemporary spin on the fairy tales that people in society know and love. Despite the contemporary aspects of the plot that makes space for feminism, familial true love and alternative family dynamics, the overall metanarrative is challenged by the Swan Queen movement because it the source of “canon.” Canon serves as a source
of legitimate information about the program. In some fandom circles, it takes on almost Biblical importance, as people often quote from it, make reference to it and rely on it for possible interpretations of the program (Jenkins and Tulloch 1995). The mediated plot of fairy tales refers to those stories that feature “true love” and “happy endings.” These were not always common traits of fairy tales, as Warner (2014) explains, narratives that started with “once upon a time” were often terrifying tales filled with misadventures. The happy ending, however, has become a universal trait in most fairytales and continues to impact both children and adults by serving as a lens through which they interpret narratives in general (Bacchilega 2013). These narratives inspire countless interpretations and re-framings but, as the findings below will show, there are certain interpretations that are not as well received. The Swan Queen narratives respond to the pushback against their interpretations through the production of anti-stories.

Furthermore, throughout these narratives, the activists did not develop a uniform method of negotiating metanarratives. In fact, the two approaches that were used most frequently were inconsistent and opposite in their depiction of the metanarrative. The following will display the reclaiming and rejecting strategies used throughout the discourses.

**Reclaiming**

Activists from both movements employed a reclaiming strategy when negotiating metanarratives. Throughout the anti-stories, the activists largely share the conviction that the metanarratives are cultural promises that have yet to be fulfilled. Many of the narratives acknowledge that the promises are not all realistic, but they display yearning and desire for the associated outcomes of the metanarrative.
Many of the anti-stories posted by Occupy Wall Street activists display a tacit understanding of the American Dream, what it entails and they also generally express the conviction that American society still thoroughly believes in this dream and the ideals it espouses. In negotiating the metanarratives, the activists seem to be grappling with their own beliefs about this Dream. This is particularly true for those that wish for the major tenets of this Dream to be possible, such as those who ardently believe that hardworking people should be rewarded for their efforts. Throughout the following anti-stories, the activists are confronting this aspect of the metanarratives with evidence from their own experiences:

I am 28 and grew up believing in the American Dream. I worked my way up from Community College to a 4 year school with a good reputation on a partial scholarship. All I have to show for it is unforgivable debt, no job since ’09, and now on state medicaid program. I live with my 61 year old Mom who lives paycheck to paycheck. When she becomes to ill to work, how will I support us? I can’t even support MYSELF. My boyfriend of 5 years was laid off in ’09 from a $20/hr job with benefits. Now works for $10/hr with no benefits. We can’t afford to get married, and we will NEVER be able to afford kids. Our dreams are blocked at every turn. Every Day Is A Struggle and we live in fear, with no idea how to break free. All We Want Is A Fair Shot At A Good Life! (OWS 174)

I have spent the majority of my adult life disenchanted & angry because my grandparents taught me that the “American Dream: was achievable. Yet, no matter how hard I’ve tried, I’ve been unable to achieve mine.” (OWS 714)

I stress out every single day about bills and finances. And no matter what we do we never get ahead. I’d appreciate it if people stopped calling me lazy, stop saying I don’t try, and stop telling me I don’t want to help myself. Because it’s BS…I worked everyday of my adult life, and up until a week before I had my daughter. I then went back to work 6 weeks later. I have done everything you claim I should do to get ahead, and so has my Fiancee, and instead it’s getting worse. I want the American Dream, I want to succeed, and I want to give my daughter the best life possible. All I want is an even playing field and a fair shot. (my emphasis OWS 147)

The treatment of the American Dream here suggests that it informs these activists’ perceptions of their own experiences. In the first anti-story, the activist is displaying the extent to which their personal life trajectory diverges from the anticipated outcomes of the American Dream. According to this individual, however, the Dream is not the
problem; it is what is blocking the dream that is the problem. The dream is actually positioned as the potential hero in this story. However, the activist fails to give the entities blocking the dream a definitive name and as a result, this story lacks a villain.

The anti-stories display a similar understanding of the American Dream as something that they want and believe that they have earned. In this second post, the use of the word “should” demonstrates an understanding of the implicit rules and regulations of the American Dream. If people are lazy and refuse to put in the work, they will not succeed and not end up with a life they can be proud of. This is also made clear in the first and third anti-stories where their negotiation of the American Dream concludes with a statement expressing the profound desire for a “fair shot” and their American dream.

This stated desire for the American dream is present in many anti-stories that use the re-claiming strategy and this desire is often reflected in activists’ claims that they are constantly searching for this dream:

I adjunct for 3 colleges. No benefits, no retirement. My husband teaches also. This year, his pay was reduced by $400/month. That money would’ve paid for our monthly electric, phone, internet, and water bills. My husband now works 2 other jobs. That’s how we support our family. But for how long? The uncertainty is scary. We did everything right. Went to college. Started a family. Earned 2 degrees each. Worked hard. Lived modestly. Stayed out of debt as much as we could. And now we find ourselves working harder than ever for litter pay. Where is our American Dream? (OWS 227)

i am an art student in debt.
trying to prove i can make it
trying to survive on nothing
trying to help my parents who work to much for too little.
Parents that immigrated for the American dream,
but what American Dream?
All i see are greedy CEO’s and Politicians. (OWS 216)

Though the tone of these anti-stories could easily be interpreted as sarcastic, the trajectory of the narratives, as non-linear as they may be, suggests a long-term adherence to the potential promise of the American Dream. The first anti-story is representative of
how many Occupy narratives refer to the fact that they “did everything right.” This perception is often followed by statements similar to the ones seen here, where the individual lists the various milestones of their life and then comments on the fact that none of these milestones seemed to lead to the economic stability they anticipated. Therefore, the negotiation of the American Dream and the question that ends their narrative reclaim the dream through an articulation of deservingness.

The activist’s refusal to back down is also common throughout reclaiming narratives. An activist put it this way: “I was promised the American Dream; I was promised freedom. If I don’t get it from the rich, selfish people in power, I will take it for myself” (OWS 922). This anti-story suggests that the activist is participating in the movement to reclaim the American Dream. Altogether these narratives suggest that the activists are thoroughly frustrated with the American system, as they believe it is causing many of the problems they are experiencing, but this frustration does not completely extend to the ideology of the American Dream.

The Swan Queen discourse also presents its own version of the reclaiming strategy. In this case, the overall metanarrative is a bit more nuanced as it includes both the well-known plots of classic fairy tales and the revised plot of Once Upon a Time. Similar to the activists above, these activists are also reclaiming their futures through the narrative construct of the happy ending for the characters in the Swan Queen relationship:

A love story about two women who share a child would be beautiful, powerful and so damn important to young kids in this day and age, where people like to tell you that being gay is accepted, and yet representation for us is still slim. Queer kids need to see that they can get their fairytale ending too, and Swan Queen would have been a perfect, slow-burn way to do that. (their emphasis, SQ 361)

This ship has changed my life in ways I never imagined…I can’t put into words just how much Swan Queen means to me, not just personally, but also just how much I know it would mean in terms of Queer representation as a whole. As a child, I was never into fairytale...I
never really felt like I truly saw myself in these fairytales. I was never interested in being saved by Prince Charming, or Prince Phillip, or any other prince really. I wanted to be the one who got to save the girl. And, above all, I wanted to feel like there was a place in the world for someone like me. Swan Queen has given me hope that maybe, just maybe, queer children today won’t have to go through what I went through as a child. Swan Queen has given me hope that the world might be ready to welcome people like me into their love stories. Swan Queen has truly given me hope for a Happy Ending. (SQ 422)

The anti-stories above are representative of the activists’ desire to reclaim the happy endings in order to display to the world that these kinds of happy endings are possible for those in the LGBTQ+ community. These anti-stories speak less to representation in media specifically and call for a more universal inclusion in fairy tale narratives.

Therefore, the narratives express the desire for the Swan Queen romance to follow the same plot of the typical fairy tales. Allowing for this kind of plot development for this relationship would not necessarily alter the metanarrative as it exists; rather it would make the narrative more inclusive.

In the Swan Queen discourse, the activists also often reclaim their rights to metanarrative outcomes by addressing the role that heteronormativity plays in

metanarratives:

I honestly believe that Swan Queen is endgame. The gradual progression of the relationship mirrors classic romance formula. Boy meets girl, boy and girl hate each other, boy and girl join forces to fight for common goal, boy and girl exchange longing looks, boy and girl defeat enemy, boy and girl fall in love. Just change one little word. (SQ 378)

If Emma was a male, I don’t think we even need to explain anything about or justify our ship…The more I look into the show, the more I am convinced that Swan Queen is intentional. (SQ 702)

This fandom really opened my eyes and changed my views of the world. Showed me what heterosexism/heteronormativity is and how prevalent it exists in every aspect of existence, I can’t unsee it, it’s infuriating and I’m enraged by the lack of queer representation in media. That’s why I’m clinging so hard to canon endgame Swan Queen like my life depends on it. (SQ 192)

The reference to “endgame” in the first anti-story in this set is a common term in fandom.

It reflects the belief that Swan Queen is going to be included with the canon storyline of
the television program. In this way, this phrase takes on narrative significance in that it suggests that the members of this movement are plotting the development of the relationship correctly. Anti-stories such as this also take the time to explain this by considering the implications of one of the characters being male. Their negotiation of this metanarrative posits that this change in gender would guarantee the development of the standard fairytale plot. The realization that this plot is not guaranteed to LGBTQ+ couples leads many within the movement to condemn this as a form of heteronormativity.

Another way that this movement reclaims the metanarrative is through reference to canon and its significance as briefly stated above. Throughout the reclaiming narrative, activists largely associate canon with legitimacy. In the following posts, fans flesh out the movement’s complicated relationship to canon:

...canon is canon. However crappy it may be, it counts for something huge. It’s representation, recognition and validation. Fanon is important, fanon makes a difference, we won’t be entirely lost to history, but fan works are the raw scraps we’ve been tossed...while canon is being cooked and served a fresh, homemade, full course meal. (SQ 640)

Here, the activist is associating inclusion with legitimacy. The content and the tenets of canon may be problematic, but they are more desirable than no inclusion whatsoever. The reference to “fanon” here or fan-created narratives, suggests that they are a valid form of expression, but even they do not hold the potential weight of canon inclusion. Canon, then, is depicted as the potential hero of this story in that it would rescue the Swan Queen story and the movement from illegitimacy. Like the anti-stories of OWS above, it is clear that there is this desire for their activist narratives to be viewed as legitimate.

In all of the anti-stories, the activists are reclaiming metanarratives in an attempt to position themselves within the context of that narrative experience. The plotting of their experiences and their interpretations thoroughly diverges from these narratives, yet
the activists display a conviction that they should not. Where the anti-stories of these movements contrast, however, is in their personal narrative focus. The Occupy activists are providing information about their own personal identities and experiences in order to negotiate the metanarrative, while the Swan Queen movement is doing this for the narrative of the Swan Queen relationship. This is a reflection of the relative concerns of the movement and this distinction is also apparent throughout the rejection anti-stories.

Unlike the anti-stories above, the rejection anti-stories negotiate metanarratives in a way that leads other activists to very different conclusions about the collective future of the movement and the activists in it.

**Rejecting**

The full out rejection of metanarratives as a strategy is not about what the activists ultimately desire; it is geared toward the expression of grievances and the legitimation of the activists’ commitment to the cause. For example, one woman tells the tale of what happened after the birth of her child. She lost her job briefly, and even though she eventually found work again, she says that she sees:

> …no decent cars in our future, nor do I see us able to buy a house. I shop at discount grocery stores, I buy second hand, and the dollar store is my saving grace. I would like to feel secure from week to week. I would like to have a savings account, and be able to put away money for my baby to go to school. I would like to buy a house and have a reliable car that isn’t jimmy rigged together. I am not afraid of working. As I said, I’m a working class person…but I would like to get paid a living wage, and have a career instead of fast food. IS THAT TOO MUCH TO ASK? When I was a kid, they told us about the American Dream, and how we could be whatever we wanted. This isn’t really what I had pictured. I have a kid, that’s true…but bankruptcy, a small apartment, and a ton of bills just wasn’t’ what I had hoped for. I don’t even have the picket fence. (OWS 43)

Other anti-stories similarly paint rather grim pictures of the current state of America to display the ways in which the American Dream is no longer an option:

> I know that the reason our country was once great was because we enabled an infrastructure that allowed the American Dream to be achievable. But you cannot get a doctor to heal you by
bartering with a chicken anymore. Corporate greed has made our healthcare costs three times what they should be. Our farmers live in poverty while the GMO seed industry takes their subsidies for obscene profits. (OWS 827)

In the first anti-story (OWS 43), the distinction between a reclaiming and a rejection strategy is subtle, but significant, in that the individual does not express a sense of longing for the dream or the potential outcomes of the dream, but essentially claims that if she is living the American Dream, it is more like a nightmare. It is devoid of all the comforts promised her, and even the simple accouterments like the white picket fence are missing. The point of disconnection from the American Dream begins with her inability to work, but even when she gets another job, there is no hope that the work will help to elevate her and her family from one economic position to another. In fact, she does not see potential improvement in the future at all. There are a number of anti-stories that attempt to provide explanations for what happened to the American Dream. In the second anti-story (OWS 827) they do this by claiming that the basic infrastructure that allowed for this dream no longer exists. This is another way that rejection anti-stories differ from reclaiming anti-stories; they are more likely to feature villains, which in this case is corporate greed and the 1%.

Many of the activists, like those above, report feeling a profound sense of disconnection from the American Dream. The anti-stories below go as far as to claim that the American Dream is “dead” or a “lie”:

I am a 24 year old college graduate. I have a B.A. in English. After 5 years of work to better myself, I am now working 40-50 hours a week making barely more than I did when I graduated from high school 6 years ago. I work 2 jobs and can’t afford to move out of my parents house even with a roommate. I have $33,000+ to pay in student loans. (I’m barely paying interest.) I can’t find a full time job because I have no experience… no one will hire me so I can gain some I’m stressed out and depressed. I feel trapped. The American Dream is dead for my generation. #Wearethe99%. (OWS 906)

I am 31, with a bachelor’s from Pepperdine University. I am $30,000 in debt from student loans. I work at Levi’s full time for $17/hr and Im grateful for a job. My mother lives with me,
she has lots of physical and mental health problems. I cant put her on my insurance even though she’s a dependent on my taxes. Between her meds, bills, food, gas etc., my checking is constantly overdrawn. I borrow money from friends constantly. I will never own a home. I will never have a savings account. I will never have good credit. The American Dream is a lie. Im mad as hell and I am the 99%. (Oct. 317)

The “American Dream” has wasted away into a NIGHTMARE. I would rather go to another country that cares for its people. (OWS 290)

The first two anti-stories (OWS 906, OWS 317) are reversing the standard plot of the American Dream, as the success occurs at the outset of the story and the hardships/disenchantment come towards the end. The list of limitations suggests the elimination of any hope that the American Dream is at all possible, and in the case of the first anti-story, that it is impossible for a whole generation of Americans. The feelings of being “trapped” and “mad as hell” towards the end imply that these are the reasons for taking part in the movement – they literally do not seem to have other options. Then, there is the last anti-story (OWS 290), which states that the activist’s disconnection from this dream is so profound that they feel that they should leave the country. Treating metanarratives in this way suggests that activists utilize the metanarrative as the groundwork their commitment to social change that diverges from the American Dream construct. The rejection of the narrative is crucial to development of the activists as individuals and the development of the movement.

Rejection also informs the treatment of the Once Upon a Time metanarrative. Many of the Swan Queen activists reject the canon of the program and the standard romantic plot of fairy tales. This contrasts with the re-claiming strategy where high value is placed upon canon inclusion. The rejection strategy is often grounded in the belief that the Once Upon a Time narrative and the norms that it espouses are not relatable. One example of this can be seen below:
I saw the trailers of ouat [Once Upon a Time] and when the Evil Queen appeared I said to myself,” She’s so good (add some heart eyes). I have to watch this!” even when I’m not a fan of the old Disney movies (because I felt like I couldn’t relate to those stories in any way) I knew I was in to admire her (that was gay). I mean she’s a very good looking, Latina, sociopath villain. I wan an evil regal before I started watching the show. (SQ 482)

The conflict here is between the homosexual attraction of the activist and the heteronormative plots of the classic fairy tales and Disney movies specifically. Anti-stories such as this build upon the discussion of identity in Chapter 3. The plots so thoroughly deviate from her experience that they subsequently alienate this individual. She, therefore, is uninterested in the narrative as it is developed by Once Upon a Time, but maintains her commitment to the characters and their potential.

This commitment is exhibited in other anti-stories that exemplify the rejection strategy. In these anti-stories, activists express an explicit preference for the fan fiction narratives created by those who ship Swan Queen. A number of activists reject the canon through claims of how poorly constructed canon is. This is directed more at the television program, but in challenging the program, activists are also challenging the standard plot of fairy tales:

if you love this ship, don’t quit it. Swan Queen are too much. They are too beautiful. There is too much story to them that we should ever abandon them because of what poorly written canon is happening. Forget Once Upon a Time, we’ve been a separate fandom for a good long while now really…We did this. We took a story and let it blossom into one of the most beautiful stories I’ve ever had the privilege to encounter. Swan Queen is ours and they will never take it away from us. So whatever bullshit is “canon” – we don’t need it. We are telling our own story now. Ours. (SQ 233)

Well, even though the OUAT writing team aren’t saying this right now, Swan Queen is actually the greatest love story I’ve ever seen. This fandom is beyond incredible. I never thought in a million years that when I joined Tumblr, I’d find a group like Swen to fall into. And no matter how much I hate OUAT now (I do, I really don’t like the show anymore, I’m purely watching for Regina and Swan Queen/ Swan Mills moments) I just can’t give up on Swan Queen. And once again with this Believe in Swan Queen movement (thanks by the way [redacted because content contains names]) we continue to grow stronger as a fandom that refuses to be silenced. (SQ 187)

I’m ________, 29 years old lesbian, and I live in Germany. I have an M.A. degree in American Studies with a focus on film…Now what makes Swan Queen so special is, interestingly
enough, its consistency within an overall wholly inconsistent show. I don’t think I need to mention my frustrations with the amount of retconning\textsuperscript{14} that has been going on or the lack of character development that 99% of the characters have suffered after S1. (SQ 366)

I’m a Canuck living as an expat in England for the past 30 years...Toward the end of season 2 I was totally done with watching the show I just wasn’t about to invest too much of my time watching the decline of something that had been so promising. I’ve only watched SQ clips, and music vids since then they’re so much more fulfilling. (SQ 648)

In the first anti-story (SQ 233), the activist is pushing for others to maintain their commitment despite the challenges that the movement faced. The anti-story here is exhibiting rejection of the metanarrative by establishing the Swan Queen movement as a separate entity from the program that inspired its development. The establishment of this separation suggests that the movement does not need to be reliant upon canon content to legitimize their claims. The rejection of canon is used as a tactic to further solidify allegiance to the Swan Queen narrative and movement. The anti-stories below it also reflect this frustration by rejecting the program and expressing preference for the narratives of the movement. This suggests that the rejection of metanarratives is a response to the rejection of the Swan Queen community.

Though different in their content and overall causes, the Swan Queen movement anti-stories take on a similar format to the Occupier anti-stories. True, the anti-stories of the Swan Queen movement are often longer, as the activists often dedicate more space to describing their entrance into the fandom/movement and unpacking the Swan Queen narrative, as they understand it. However, within both movements, activists are negotiating metanarratives to destabilize the hold that they have on their experiences and their interpretations. It is in these anti-stories where the activists’ commitment to their

\textsuperscript{14} Retconning is when back story is included in a program that contradicts something that was already included in canon.
cause is most apparent. The Occupy anti-stories reference being “mad” and continuing to fight for the cause and the Swan Queen anti-stories further reinforce their existence as a movement.

**Discussion: Flipping the Script**

The conclusion of this study reinforces Polletta’s claim that narratives are “socially patterned” and they continue to be so when shared on digital networks. Literature on social movements and online narratives could lead one to the conclusion that these stories are personally patterned and dictated by the nuanced and detailed aspects of individual opinions and lives. The social patterning of the narratives is reflected in the themes present throughout. It is possible that the social patterning of online narratives has escaped the attention of other researchers because the social patterning of social movements is also changing. Social movements and collectives that organize for social justice purposes do not follow the tenets of those who came before. The cultural emphasis upon pushing boundaries and being free of the constraints of binaries is also taking place within activism and social movements, as they are often seeking more broad societal (and ideological) changes as opposed to specific policy changes. The two strategies, (1) re-claiming and (2) rejecting metanarratives, display this throughout the analysis.

Throughout the use of these strategies, the metanarratives in both movements are alternatively portrayed as the hero and the villain. When the hero, the metanarrative is portrayed as that which is capable of removing people from their dire circumstances. When the villain, the metanarrative is depicted as the entity that is robbing the individual of their future. These two seemingly contradictory methods are being used to build
narratives of legitimacy for both movements. By re-claiming the outcomes of metanarratives, members of both movements are attempting to legitimize their desire for change and the expected benefits of change. The underlying motive at the heart of dismantling the common plot associated with the metanarratives appears to be, ironically, the desire for more inclusive metanarratives. In the case of Occupiers, the desire for the security and safety of the American Dream persists despite all of the evidence that the model the narrative proposes is known to be unrealistic. For the Swan Queen movement, individuals still insist that a happy ending for their characters and for LGBTQ characters in general should be possible. In rejecting metanarratives, the activists are legitimating their commitment as activists to an un-just cause. Upon first reading of the digital discourses from these two movements, the re-claiming strategy appeared contrary to overall purposes of the people fighting for these causes. The rejection strategy was far more likely and more clearly fit the conventional contentious narrative models addressed by Fine and Polletta. The fact that the narratives throughout are more personalized and personalizable is what creates the possibility for these two strategies to co-exist and they ultimately lead individuals to the same conclusion: change is necessary.

Additionally, the presence of personal information throughout these narratives may lead some to the same conclusions of the scholars referenced above. The narratives are too personal to have little collective efficacy. However, the presence of the personal is one of the ways in which connection and collectivity is achieved. Personalization does not mean that the collectives are devoid of collective contentious narratives, rather personalization facilitates the development of multiple and sometimes contradictory strategies when debunking old metanarratives and developing new ones. Yet,
personalization is employed in the movements differently. In the first case, personal
details are laid out as evidence of a life of hard work and ultimate hardships. These
details are specific, but at the same time, common enough that they could happen to
anyone. The collective identification is in the mirroring of activist’s struggles. For, Swan
Queen, however, personal details are often meant to humanize the activists involved. The
belief was that the faceless nature of fandom hindered the development of intimacy and
cohesiveness amongst the Swan Queen movement activists. Personal details and personal
images allowed for further reliability and collective commitment. This discourse suggests
those social movements, whether they organize online or in person, are experiencing new
and different barriers to legitimacy. In the cases discussed above, the movements did not
negotiate metanarratives in a uniform way. The fact that there were two different
strategies utilized by activists suggests a lack of consensus about what the collective
grievances and goals of the movement.

My analysis shows that these stories do not fit perfectly within the categories
mapped out by Fine (1995) or the suspenseful narratives discussed by Polletta (2006).
True, elements of “horror,” “war stories” and “happy endings” are there, but these
categories do not encompass the vast majority of the narratives on Tumblr. Also, telling
stories in ways that would be perceived as suspenseful does not seem to be a concern, as
activists often provide abundant details about how they came to be a part of their
respective movements. I argue that the narratives above should be considered “anti-
stories.” The “anti-story” is “the cynical and naturally occurring counter-reaction to
an official story of goodness that fails to reflect the reality of the audiences experience”
(Snowden 2001:2). To add to this definition, I argue that the anti-story is a tool used
widely by digital social movements to re-claim and reject dominant metanarratives that inform people’s perceptions and expectations. The anti-story is a tenet of social movement hybrid identity. This is because it allows for the hybridization of narratives, both offline and online, both personal and collective. The anti-story is a tool of social movement’s with hybrid identities because it serves as a method of dismantling conventional plots and status quo thinking.

A potential implication of this research is that social movements may no longer possess or require broad general collective narratives. Indeed, they may have collective grievances, but activists are more interested in developing niche narratives of experiences that are directly relevant to them and to others that are like them. Many social movements scholars might come to the conclusion that this will lead to fragmentation within social movements where the strength of the collective is diminished in the face of increased personalization. It is difficult to say whether or not this will ultimately lead the downfall of the social movement as a form of collective organization, rather it is clear that the more that marginalized and subcultural collectives attempt to use the social movement as a form of organization, the more the form will change.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

Twenty-first century social movements look different from earlier iterations. That difference is largely due to the way in which the internet impacts communication and thus redefines how social movements construct identity. The question is: are they changing so much that they are no longer recognizable to researchers as social movements? The anxiety at the center of researchers’ concerns is where do we draw the line between what we consider a social movement and what we do not consider a social movement; what are the potential negative implications for calling any collective that use the label social movement, a movement? How do we maintain the concept of social movements as a meaningful category of collective action? Though I cannot provide satisfying answers to all of these questions, my analysis suggests that some of the anxiety surrounding this issue may be unfounded. The discourses analyzed throughout this dissertation reveal that the social movement as a concept and the types of engagement it inspires continues to be a meaningful form of collective action. The above analysis shows that many of the essential tenets of social movement organization are present in online social movements, but they appear in forms that are not immediately intelligible to researchers.15

Diani’s (1992) framework for defining social movements proves to be a useful tool when discussing online social movements. The search for correlates to the basic tenets he provides aided in the identification of the central tenets of online social movements. According to Diani, the essential components of movements are: “networks of relations between a plurality of actors; collective identity and conflictual issues” (Diani

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15 These forms, however, are increasingly intelligible to those who are embracing technology and the boundaryless nature of their offline and online worlds.
When applied to online social movements, the networks of relations between a plurality of actors are found in identity markers, collective identity can most clearly be identified in both identity markers and the themes in the visual images and conflictual issues are navigated in movement narratives.

These correlates suggest a changing relationship between social movements and social media, as the specific tenets that structure offline social movements cannot be perfectly translated into digital space. Analysis of the identity markers, images and narratives suggests that online social movements are developing strategies of activism and representation that are meant to blend offline and online. In this way, online activism serves as a hybrid form of offline and online action. I believe that the Occupy and Swan Queen social movements are evidence of a paradigm shift in social movements. As I stated in the introduction, I believe that the strategies and tactics of the Occupy and Swan Queen movements are similar, in that their online mobilization is governed by the construction of hybrid identities, where the activists display and negotiate a balance between their offline and online identities. In their identity markers, images and narratives, activists are displaying strategies that bridge the gap between personal (identities, images and narratives) and collective (identities, images and narratives). Collective identity proves to still be a significant aspect of movement development, but it is does not dictate the “we” of the movement as it once did. It is hybrid identity that does this instead. It is perhaps more productive to think of online social movements in general as a form of hybrid identity in that the movement is designed by and for the purposes of activist and social movement identity deployment. The following will expand upon this
concept of hybrid identity and how it is demonstrated in the analysis in Chapter three through five.

**Hybrid Identity**

Collective identity, according to Taylor (1989:771) is a “shared definition of a group that derives from members’ common interests, experiences, and solidarity.” The members of these movements do in fact have common interests, experiences and solidarity, but what was often unclear within the discourses was how shared the definitions were. This was best displayed in all of the chapters, as activists in both movements seem to have multiple strategies for expressing who they are, what they look like and what they stand for. The fact that collective identity could be located in online discourses challenges the work of earlier researchers, who tended to assume that collective identity development does not occur within movements that are highly personalized. However, the concept of collective identity does not account for the variety of identity practices that are occurring within the digital discourses of the movement. The concept of hybrid identity provides a potential solution to this.

Hybrid identity is both the process and the end result of identity development online. The hybrid identities are models of identity that simultaneously allow the personalization of activism and development of collective meaning making practices. Unlike the concept proposed by Heaney and Rojas (2014: 1055), which was based on an “identity + 1 model,” this conception of hybrid identity is based on an “identity +” model. Here the plus serves the same purposes as the + in LGBTQ+, in that it is meant to represent the wide variety of other gender and sexuality orientations that could be included. Therefore, hybrid identity is a model that is adaptive to a number of different
identities and identity expressions, which can be seen throughout the identity markers, images and narratives of the Occupy and Swan Queen movements.

**Identities.** The identity practices engaged in by the activists from both movements involved both their offline and online identities. The detailed personal information and experiences connected the activists to their offline identities, while their engagement in collective meaning making connected them to their online identities and movements. A cohesive collective identity proved to be fairly illusive for both movements, when thinking about collective identity in a more conventional sense. Investigation into their respective discourses, however, proved that the movements are developing collective identities through displays of similar attributes, goals, interests, meanings, experiences and emotions. The movements also engaged in hashtag identity practices. Upon closer inspection, hashtag identities do not fully speak to the identity of the activists or the movement. Therefore, it is in the layers of identity where the hybrid identity of the movement can be fully contextualized. Hybrid identity covers a range of identities from the personal to the collective and the hashtag. This range of identities indicates that these posts are meant to serve a variety of identity practices, from personal development, to public displays of identity and also the creation of a polyvocal public discourse, which means the identity practices range from specific to general.

**Images.** The images are a form of hybrid identity in that they are a very literal representation of the social movements. The archiving feature of Tumblr allows for the posts of these individuals to be viewed together. Therefore, the mass visual representation of individuals aggregates to become the visual representation of the collective. Each of
the strategies of visual representation (avatar, partial selfie and selfie) involves a different interpretation of the hybridization of the activists’ offline and online identities. In these movements, identity is variously constructed to reflect the activists’ personal orientations to the movement and personal issues with revealing physical aspects of their identity. The images where the personal physical body of the individual are least present are in actuality those visual representations where the collective identity of the movements are more apparent. In online movements, however, personal identity and connection to the physical body is a more significant sign of connection to the movement. The activists are placing their offline consistent identities at stake for their online activism. These three forms of visual representation are the second common tenet of hybrid identity. Hybrid identities allow for various visual constructions of the offline and online self.

**Narratives.** The hybrid identity practices revealed throughout the narratives reflect the development of narrative devices that allow for a reexamination of stories that were once treasured. Therefore, this aspect of hybrid identity is rooted in shared storytelling conventions. These conventions facilitate a kind of critical engagement with ideological constructs that informed the activists’ personal experiences. Therefore, telling stories about stories lies at the heart of the hybrid identities of both movements. The fact that there are two primary strategies for navigating metanarratives does not detract from this conclusion, rather it supports it. The purpose of these narratives is not to arrive at a unified consensus of what the problems are, who is responsible and what needs to be done. Rather, the purpose is flush out perceptions of individual experiences for the purpose of aggregating collective experiences. When taken together, these strategies result in the construction of an “anti-story,” a form of storytelling utilized online because
it serves the dual purposes of allowing people to delve into their individual circumstances, while at the same time allowing them to call into question the collective plots associated with metanarratives. In other words, these activists are personalizing collective social justice narratives through the negotiation of metanarratives. The “anti-story” is another tenet of hybrid identity and it is essentially a hybrid narrative composed of multiple storylines with a variety of social and cultural contexts.

The hybrid identity diverges from the norms of past social movement organization. The hybrid nature of social movements online results in abundant discourses that are difficult to navigate when only using conventional social movement analytical constructs and research methods. Therefore, the concept of hybrid identity and its essential tenets (identity markers, images and narratives) may be an analytical construct that yields more productive analyses of newer and developing social movements. However, thinking about how the components of social movements are translated into digital space has led to constructive information about how activists are building communities in unexpected digital spaces. The combination of methods utilized throughout this dissertation also suggest that qualitative inquiry is necessary for the assessment of these types of hybrid identities. The following section will further expound upon the affordances of Tumblr and how these affordances facilitated the development of hybrid identities for both movements.

**Affordances and Activism**

As discussed above, an affordance is a “type of action or characteristic that a technology enables through its design” (Earl and Kimport 2011:10). This definition of
affordances specifically focuses on the technological tools that the social media site provides. Through these tools Tumblr facilitates the development of much more creative and personalized posts than most other social media. As the “According to Tumblr” section boasts, a person can include a wide variety of content and choose from a variety of different styles to display this content. The microblogs produced have relatively few limitations in terms of type or length of content. It also allows for the inclusion of links and other social media posts. In fact, members will often post a link to an article, a series of tweets, reddit, Facebook posts, etc. and comment about them on Tumblr. In this way, the affordances of Tumblr allow for contextual development and critique of mainstream content. These affordances of Tumblr best explain the widespread development of collectives and subcultures on the site.

Khazraee and Novak (2018: 10) propose a slight intervention to the discussion of affordances by proposing that social media in general provides cultural affordances such as “affordances for discourse and affordances for performance.” They state, “social media affordances for discourse contribute to the collective action framing process and movement narrative construction, and affordances for performance make modular performances of protest possible through transgressive photobiographies.” The findings from this dissertation support this conclusion, but it is also important to note that Khazraee and Novak’s (2018) observations are based on analysis of Facebook specifically. I believe that these cultural affordances need to be contextualized in order to better apply to other social media.

One of the important questions to consider in activists’ use of Tumblr, is why Tumblr? Why did the activists choose to build community and post the kinds of content
discussed throughout this dissertation on Tumblr and not on another more mainstream social media site? By conventional standards, the purpose of posting content online or in any other medium is to bring attention to the movement and garner additional support for the cause. One could conclude if the purpose of posting content on Tumblr is to gain visibility, then the activists should have chosen a website with more mainstream attention. Could this be signaling to the fact that in a Goffmanian sense, social media provides people with a variety of front stages and back stages? If this is the case, then do the affordances of Tumblr serve as an activist back stage? Interpreted in this way, the discourses of the movements could be viewed as the equivalent of the types of communicative dynamics that would occur in many social movement planning meetings and events. On the other hand, this can be interpreted another way; perhaps the activists are not as concerned about mainstream attention as they are forging connections with others.

The generational trends, popularized by Millennials, are appealing to people of all ages and seem to be spreading. One of these trends is the search for engagement that feels more genuine. As noted above, one of the organizers of Black Lives Matter claimed that Tumblr is a site where more organic communities can be formed. Sharing on the site in intimate yet public. The affordances of Tumblr, therefore, allow for an openness and vulnerability because the purpose is not to garner public sympathy or offers of assistance, it is to establish solidarity and build collective purpose that supersedes personal struggle.

**The Online Social Movement: A Proposal and Areas for Future Research**

The online social movement with its translated movement strategies is evolving as a form with the increasing development of social media and affordances. As the concept
evolves, so will the social justice issues that are represented. Therefore, it is important to make space for movements like the Swan Queen movement. This movement may not reflect the typical concerns of activists. However, this conclusion is based on the assumption that entertainment based concerns are not politically meaningful. People are dedicating more time to media, both mainstream and social, and as a result, media is a growing concern for lay consumers and activists alike. Movements, such as the Swan Queen movement, which are based in popular culture, are reflecting broad societal changes and concerns. These movements, which may now be thought of as “awkward” movements that do not fit into any specific social movement category, may at some point become a common sight on social media and elsewhere.

In the 1990s, Gamson addressed the ways in which activists were attempting to intentionally blur identities in order to reveal the constraining nature of labels. This is also apparent within the movements discussed here, however, what is unclear is how intentional this blurring is. It is more likely that blurred identities are more the norm in certain digital spaces. The discourses display a desire to not be labeled or identified as any one role, including those roles that brought them into the movement in the first place. I believe that is because the “social movement,” (or any form of collective contention that is deemed overly hierarchical or bureaucratic) has become a heteronormative institution. The types of binary distinctions that social movements support, like the “us vs. them” dynamics, are not in line with the cultural and social trends that advocate multiplicity. The dynamics of the movement cultivate discourses that are more of the “but, and” variety. By this I mean that they allow and embrace ambiguity. I propose instead that
“social movements” as a label be treated as more of an umbrella term, which encompasses a wide variety of social justice initiatives.

Furthermore, one subject that should be considered at length in future research is the relationship between online and offline mobilization. Researchers have made a variety of claims about this relationship; with some of the most popular concluding that online organization is simply a precursor to or an ancillary aspect of social movements. The aim of this dissertation is not to argue that offline mobilization should not play a role in significant collective action; rather I aim to make space for the legitimacy of those movements that organize and develop identity online. Despite the existence of an offline component for Occupy, their online tactics and expression of contention were guided by the same conventions as the Swan Queen movement. This suggests that they are not reliant upon offline organization for their identity or tactics. The other important thing to note is that the online mobilization had a much longer lifespan than the offline mobilization. It started before and continued long after the occupations, therefore, online mobilization experience different lifespans and rate of progression.

Another aspect of offline and online mobilization that needs consideration is, how the offline and online mobilization may differ, not just in terms of tactics, but in terms of culture, grievances and goals. An even cursory examination of the Occupy movement displays the importance activists placed upon the open airing of grievances, both online and offline. However, the offline mobilization limited people’s ability to authentically contribute to the discussion. In essence, it seems that the offline and online components of the movement functioned very differently. Offline, activists were seeking broad societal changes, some of which would have required broad revolutionary changes,
whereas online many activists placed a lot of emphasis on ideological changes by negotiating what America represents and how this construct specifically relates to employment and debt. Within the online community, it was more acceptable to acknowledge that many people were concerned about how America is broken from a more nostalgic perspective. The sense that many of the activists provide online is that there are yearning to live in the kind of America where successful achievement of their goals is possible, whereas the offline movement was attempting to prefigure a new kind of society that is distinct from what America is or was.

Another area of social media study that should be pursued in more depth is how people conceptualize their commitment to online activism and belonging to online social movements. I was able to glean some relevant information on this issue from social media posts and interviews, but not enough to make a generalizable claim about whether or not people deem their online social justice activity to be a truly significant action with great potential for social change. In essence, I feel that there need to be more qualitative studies of social media activism that include in-depth interviews with online activists.
Appendix

Methodology

As the field of social movements grows and changes, so does the methodological diversity of its research. Research methods were developed to account for the increasing importance of culture, identity and more recently, social media. As a result, new methods of content analyzing digital discourse have emerged. Digital discourse is so extensive that the primary and often preferred method of analysis involves coding big data in a quantitative fashion (e.g. Penney, et al. 2014; Agarwal, et al. 2014; Theocharis, et al. 2014). Therefore, these studies commonly involve using a search engine or a data scraper to comb through thousands of pieces of data (with each individual piece being a post). The data is then coded for references that recur throughout the data set and these codes most often result in conclusions about the types of content shared, where it is shared and why it is shared. However, there are few studies that attempt more in depth analysis of social media content. This observation led Lewis et al. (2013) to recommend that the approach to content analysis of social media that proves to be both comprehensive and contextually rigorous is combining big data and manual methods of analysis. In this way, they are advocating for a more qualitative approach to big data. This is the approach that I take in this dissertation. I use a mixed methods approach to best collect and analyze the data, which involved ethnographic investigation, archive creation, coding and content analysis.

I began my analysis by familiarizing myself with the norms and conventions of Tumblr. According to Varis (2014), ethnography, especially when conducted in digital settings, is not a method but an approach. By this, she means that, “ethnography is not
reduced to the employment of certain techniques, but seen as an approach to studying (digital) culture with specific epistemological claims” (Varis 2014: 2). Therefore, in order to successfully understand digital culture, it is necessary to contextualize where these cultures are established and what these sites come to represent for the people who gravitate to them. This approach involves the researcher embedding themselves within the cultures until they are familiar with the norms, symbols, and language use of the population. The research is also tasked with treating the site as a context driven setting that largely shapes the interactions and content shared on the site.

Before going on Tumblr for the first time, I was very aware that this site had a rather seedy reputation. I was told that it was a site where people would share content freely and openly and that a lot of the content that I would come across would be pornographic. I had heard this in 2011 and seven years later, Romano (2018) substantiated the widespread impact of this reputation and how pervasive it is by saying, “the site has long been plagued by an unfairly dismissive cultural reputation that reduces the entire vibrant platform to a vast repository of porn, and not much else.” According to the “about Tumblr” section of the website, it is a venue that “lets you effortlessly share anything. Post texts, photos, quotes, links, music and videos from your browser, phone, desktop, email and wherever you happen to be. You can customize everything, from colors to your theme’s HTML” (Tumblr 2016). In other words, the format of Tumblr allows the user to have a lot of control over the material they are sharing.16 It is this level of control that at times results in the sharing of content thought to be highly sexual.

16 There are no length requirements, as is the case explicitly on Twitter and implicitly on Facebook. Another part of the appeal of Tumblr is that, like Twitter, it puts you in contact with people you might not have ever contacted. Connections are made based on shared interests, as opposed to shared
This aspect of Tumblr’s reputation has come under scrutiny within the last year, as there is a new initiative to ban pornographic content from Tumblr. As Romano (2018) reports, “many users are outraged over what they see as an attempt to disrupt the entire culture of Tumblr and its community, where erotica and NSFW [Not Safe for Wife] artwork and storytelling have thrived and flourished – and where marginalized communities that have built safe spaces may now be newly vulnerable.” After exploring the site in depth, I too experienced the culture and sense of community that Tumblr cultivates. The affordances of this site allowed individuals to explore its various facets anonymously. However, as people become familiar with the other individuals within their respective niche or niches, they establish close interpersonal relationships.

Unlike Facebook or Twitter, following people on Tumblr is more about content than it is about character. In other words, on Facebook and Twitter the decision to follow someone is largely based on who they are – they are your friend, a family member or a celebrity for example – on Tumblr, however, it is about what people share and what they like. Similar to these other sites, following someone on Tumblr means that you see the content that this individual posts on your home site, which is called a dashboard. A person’s dashboard often becomes a reflection of their various social positions and interests. Though there are still only limited resources on Tumblr and the kinds of communities that develop on this site, there are some articles that have evaluated Tumblr’s aggregation of popular culture content, which led some to conclude that this is a site particularly suited for fandoms (Attu and Terra 2017). This is because accessing the content on this site is as simple as typing a keyword or hashtag into the search engine, so

contacts. As of February 28, 2018, the website features 399.1 million blogs and 158.5 billion posts; this content attracts an average of 550 million users monthly (Tumblr 2018).
fans can easily find content related to their respective entertainment preferences. It was not until Occupy Wall Street and later, the #BlackLivesMatter movement, that researchers became aware of the fact that these search engines could also be used to find social justice causes.

Typing in the hashtag associated with a movement, such as #occupywallstreet or #swanqueen will lead someone to both a variety of different individuals whose usernames reflect the hashtag and to specific posts that include this hashtag (examples of the search results can be seen in Figures 13 – 16). From there, individuals can follow other people’s blogs or re-blog content that has been shared on someone else’s page. The re-blogging function of this site is similar to sharing on Facebook and re-tweeting on Twitter. It allows the user to share content, without necessarily creating original content. It is through the blogging and re-blogging process where the culture of Tumblr is created, as objects that have relative to no meaning in mainstream culture are re-framed (Hebdige 1979) and given meaning that is then reinforced through the mimetic re-posting of content.

In order to find content related to the Occupy Wall Street and Swan Queen movements, I accessed public posts through the search engine and collected those that matched the following hashtags: #occupywallstreet, #Wearethe99%, #swanqueen and #BelieveinSwanQueen. The searches resulted in lengthy streams of data. Unlike data from search engines like Google, Tumblr does not provide the number of results associated with the search term. Upon further exploration it was clear that the posts numbered in the thousands. In order to conduct a qualitative analysis of the content, I chose to sample the data through systematic random sampling. After collecting every
fourth post, I paired down the sample even further by eliminating repeat posts, posts that had little to do with the subject (due to hashtag contamination) and post unaccompanied by writing. I then archived this content and paired each post with an acronym and a number in order to maintain the anonymity of the poster (ex: OWS 382 and SQ 178). To further ensure anonymity, I also removed identifying information, such as names and usernames. In the end, I was left with 1,684 unique posts for Occupy and 863 unique posts for Swan Queen. I then used the qualitative analysis software Nvivo to conduct line-by-line coding of the discourses. I started with broad coding categories, where I used the language of the text itself as codes. Then I coded the material a second time to ensure that the codes were consistent throughout the data.\footnote{In order to further contextualize the discourses of the movements, I interviewed 21 Tumblr users (9 from the Occupy Wall Street movement and 12 from the Swan Queen movement. For interview questions see page 153 in Appendix). I identified potential interviewees as those who either posted about the movements daily or those who self-identified as an organizer. I contacted potential interviewees through the Tumblr message function. Those who accepted my invitation were given a consent form and a list of questions. Due to the relatively anonymous nature of Tumblr activity, the interviewees were given the option to answer the questions through the message function or respond to the questions via email. I hoped to find whether or not my observations were consistent with their experiences on Tumblr and in their respective movements. The answers to the questions, posted below, reinforced the prevalence of the themes that I identified throughout the content analysis of the discourses. I focused my analysis on the content of the discourses because it was content shared organically and not in response to a prompt.} In the following sections I will address specific methodological coding strategies for each data chapter.

**Identities**

Social movements literature often depicts collective identity as being the sense of “we” that people develop during their participation in activism and their belonging to a social movement. This sense of “we” inspires solidarity with the movement and shapes both the social and personal identity of the individual (Melucci 1996). Despite the
emphasis placed upon collective identity development in social movements literature, there are numerous studies that display inconsistencies in their conclusions about the necessity of collective identity (Fominaya 2010). Throughout my analysis of the discourses, I found many references to both personal and collective identity that suggest both are necessary for the development of activist online discourse.

In my first round of coding, I coded personal statements as those containing “I” statements. It was in these “I” statements where individuals expounded upon specific descriptors and identity positions that explain who they are and their respective social positions. These statements were a common convention in both movements, as the vast majority of posts opened with such “I” statements. When first coding for collective identity, I coded for any explicit reference to the movement or to a symbol of the movement. For Occupy Wall Street, this was any explicit reference to “occupy” and the “99%” and for Swan Queen, this was any reference of “Swan Queen” or “SWEN” [Swan Queen Nation]. After this initial coding, I read through all of the passages where these references were present. I concluded that the labels did not fully reflect the collective identity of the movement. I then went back through and created another series of codes for statements that reflected shared attributes, goals, interests, experiences, meaning making practices and emotions. From these codes for Occupy Wall Street, I found numerous references to jobs, employment and debt, which I then merged into one code because the references to these often occurred within the same series of statements. The second dominant code that best reflected experiences, meaning making practices and emotions were those related to luck and fortune. These references reflected a more profound awareness of those who belong to the 99%. In the case of Swan Queen, I found
that collective identity displays were most apparent in discussions of sense-making and sexuality. The collective identity statements in the sense-making category revealed the significance of shared interpretations of the Swan Queen narrative and the sexuality category revealed the significance of shared experiences with confusion about sexuality and identifying as LGBTQ.

Images

Initially, the focus of this dissertation was on linguistic content only. I included images in the archived material in order to preserve the holistic quality of the post. However, I had not considered analyzing the images until I was coding linguistic content and realized that there were also themes within the images. I initially took the presence of these images as a given, due to the fact that Tumblr is a highly visual space. Then, I recognized that the images and what they depicted were strategic components of individual’s activist practices. The format of the posts, where images, narratives and other types of content are included, is one of the outcomes of convergence culture. Henry Jenkins (2006: 2) defines convergence as “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want.” 18 He makes the argument that convergence is defining our culture as people are looking for media that are accessible instantly on the devices they are using and for media that they can participate in and feel that they have a certain amount of control over. As a result of convergence culture, people are not just engaging

with media content differently, they are creating media content differently. This is happening with social movements as well. Convergence culture is leading to the development of different forms of social movements and different types of social movement discourses, as seen in the examples discussed throughout this dissertation.

When posting on Tumblr, images often take center stage, as they feature both representations of the individual and the narratives they are sharing. Out of the unique posts mentioned above, I found that 1,546 Occupy posts and 723 of the Swan Queen posts featured representational images that fit into the categories of (1) avatars, (2) partial selfies and (3) selfies. For the purposes of coding images, I coded avatars as those images that represented the more typical definition of avatar, or a created or abstract representation of an individual and Garbaudo’s (2015) definition of avatar, or a still image meant to represent an individual that does not depict their real identity. These images are the most anonymous form of representation. I coded partial selfies as any image where part of the body and specifically the face of the individual are revealed. Lastly, I coded selfies as those images that most closely resemble the typical selfie image, or those images that are taken of the individual by themself. An intercoder reliability test was conducted. The coder scored 93.75%, suggesting that the codes are consistent and accurately reflect the categories they are meant to represent.

**Narratives**

“Methodologically, it is fairly easy to identify a narrative in a chunk of discourse. Narratives have beginnings, middles, and ends, as well as features that set them off from other forms of discourse. By contrast, it is difficult to say where a frame begins and ends, or what is *not* ideology.”

-Francesca Polletta, 2006
The above quote by Francesca Polletta calls into question why frames have featured so prominently in social movements literature if narratives are capable of revealing important information about the movement and the individuals that take part in them. Frames and framing analysis, involve the external interpretations and desires of an audience, often prioritizing that over those who are within the movement. Therefore, frames are not accurate depictions of the true story the movement is attempting to tell. This kind of information can only be found in narratives, which according to Polletta, are a fairly distinct kind of discourse.

Methodologically, the narratives within the social movements discussed throughout this dissertation were not as easy to identify. Their beginnings, middles and ends were not anywhere near as distinct, yet, the discourses contain many familiar narrative elements. As discussed above, the narratives of these movements were not as explicit or even reminiscent of many of the conventional types of stories told in social movements. As I was coding for narrative elements I started to see patterns emerge regarding metanarratives. In the early stages of coding, I coded for any explicit reference to the metanarratives “American Dream” and “Once Upon a Time.” The code “American Dream” was made up of explicit references to the American Dream. I then went back through the data and included any references to the plot, symbols or ideology of the Dream. Similarly, the code “Once Upon a Time” was composed of explicit references to the show. During my second coding cycle, I chose to expand my coding frame by including references to the plot of the program and references to the heteronormative strictures of “true love” fairy tales. Out of the 1,684 posts for OWS, 1,128 referenced the American Dream and out of 863 posts for SWEN, 707 referenced Once Upon a Time. As
expected, the discourse on Tumblr was dominated by categories that reflect personal narratives and the ethos of the respective movements. The second most prominent theme, however, was the negotiation of metanarratives. Together, these themes evoke a pattern of online contention narrative development that involves the consolidation of personal narratives and metanarratives. Throughout the posts that include metanarratives, activists are negotiating the meaning of these stories and how it has influenced their perceptions of their lives and the movements they are a part of.

**Tumblr as a Potential Field Site for Future Research**

Tumblr’s major contribution to activism is that it serves as a repository of contention. So, what does this mean? To some, this may mean that Tumblr is different because of the sites’ aggregation of material. Jeff Juris (2012) suggested as much and essentially claimed that if activists were utilizing the site, it was for aggregation purposes as opposed to social networking purposes. This aggregation, however, has played a key role in the growth and networking of the movements discussed throughout this dissertation. It is also a community building social media site. I propose that Tumblr is a social media site that needs to be better utilized by social scientists. As our society and culture shift, there are potential digital spaces where these shifts occur unnoticed. From my time spent on Tumblr, I find that the activity and content of this site reflect a number of subjugated social justice concerns and subcultures that should be further explored. I find that the methods I used here adequately account for the complexity of this site.

Increased interest in social media and the types of cultures that arise from them need to be met with more methodological and ethical curiosity.
Figures

Figure 1: Adbusters ad, released July 13, 2011.

Figure 2: Occupy Wall Street Grievances
Figure 3: Example of Occupy Narrative

I am retired. I live on savings, retirement, and social security. I’m OK. 50 million Americans are NOT OK: they are poor, have no health insurance, or both.

But we are all the 99%. occupywallst.org

Figure 4: Example of Occupy Narrative

1. I am SWEN

I’m 19 and from the North West of England. I currently work as a receptionist & my ambitions for the future is to move away from England and into America/Canada - surrounded by people I love :)

2. I love Swan Queen

I’ve been in this fandom since the very start of Season 2, and for the past 2 and a half years Swan Queen has been my life. I’m head over heels in love with both Emma Swan and Regina Mills, together & separately. Like Lana, I have difficulty expressing just what these two women feel for each other, but, hand on my heart, Regina loves Emma and I’m pretty sure the feeling is mutual.

3. I love SWEN

All of my closest & dearest friends that I have? I have met them because of Swan Queen. I owe everything to Soon. I went through coming to terms that I’m gay with Swen. We have each others back through each and every drama and we get out the other side stronger than ever. We have the most dedicated and talented fic writers, artists, and vid makers - you have all made me cry like, a billion times.
Figure 5: Evidence of subtext in canon. (Sparks, 2013)

Figure 6: More evidence of subtext in canon. (Sparks, 2013)
Figure 8: Swan Queen Avatars
Figure 9: Occupy Wall Street Partial Selfies
Figure 10: Swan Queen Partial Selfies
Figure 11: Occupy Wall Street Selfies
Figure 12: Swan Queen Selfies
Figure 13: #occupywallstreet Tumblr screenshot search results, April 1, 2019

Figure 14: #occupywallstreet Tumblr screenshot search results, April 1, 2019
Figure 15: #swanqueen Tumblr screenshot search results, April 1, 2019

Figure 16: #swanqueen Tumblr screenshot search results, April 1, 2019
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