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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
Miami, Florida

THE ACTIVATIONS OF ACTIVISM: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in
HIGHER EDUCATION
by
Gerson Sanchez

2021

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This dissertation, written by Gerson Sanchez, and entitled The Activations of Activism: An Ethnography of Emotional Management, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

James Burns

Maria Lovett

Daniel Saunders

Benjamin Baez, Major Professor

Date of Defense: April 7, 2021

The dissertation of Gerson Sanchez is approved.

Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

Andrés G. Gil
Vice President for Research and Economic Development
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2021

DEDICATION

I am the son of immigrant parents who fled Nicaragua in an effort to find safety and refuge in the United States. Their efforts, prayers, support, and guidance have led me to this point. Undoubtedly, language is inadequate to convey the love I have for my family. Nevertheless, I hereby acknowledge them as honorary Dr. Anita Mejia and honorary Dr. Cesar Sanchez for all of the sacrifices they have made. The highest honor I can ever have is being their son. Thank you y los amo mucho!

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to the countless lives that continue to endure injustice. I hate the incessant evil that permeates our communities. But it is in the midst of such horror that we find activists, resisting and subverting in however way they can. As such, I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to the activists who continue to put their precious lives in harm’s way so that our world can be a little better.

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I would like to start by thanking my dissertation committee. Dr. Baez, Dr. Saunders, Dr. Lovett, and Dr. Burns, thank you so much for your continuous support, feedback, and care. I know you all are extremely busy, especially given the times we are living in.

I would like to give a special thank you to Dr. Baez. As Dr. Baez knows, I was not his biggest fan prior to starting the doctoral program. I will never forget the first time I stopped by Dr. Saunders' office. Dr. Saunders was new to FIU, and I wanted to welcome him to the university. I remember we started to chat. I told him I was in the Adult Education doctoral program and that I was interested in issues pertaining to race and racism.

Dr. Saunders suggested I speak with Dr. Baez. I was not thrilled by the idea, but life is weird. Coincidently, I bumped into Dr. Baez in the parking lot at FIU the following day. We began to chat, and he invited me to his office. I guess the rest is history. I do not know where I would be without Dr. Baez' mentorship, love, and support. Dr. Baez is more than a professor to me. He is my friend. I will forever be thankful for the relationship we have fostered throughout these years.

I would also like to thank my research participants. I admire the four of you for all the work you do. You all are genuinely beautiful people who continuously put others before you. You all are selfless activists who work tirelessly so this world can be more inclusive for all. Thank you!

To my wonderful siblings, Grecia and Isai, I love you so much. You all have always supported me and the work I do. I'll never forget the first WokeWednesdays episode I hosted; you two were the only audience members I had. Los amo!

I would also like to thank my WokeWednesdays followers and supporters. I began WokeWednesdays at the beginning of my doctoral journey. It has been very difficult to balance my academic work with WokeWednesdays, but, nevertheless, it has been an absolute pleasure.

To Mario Lewis, Elio Martinez, Vernon Smith, Joseph Romulus Jorge Aviles, David James, and Christian Bryant, thank you for being my brothers. Thank you for always holding me accountable. And thank you for loving me. I love you all!

To my Toxicos, I love you all. The pandemic has been horrible for so many people. On a personal level, it affected my mental health, and at times I also dealt with depression. But around July 2020, I had the pleasure of meeting seven wonderful people who changed my life for the better. I admire them so much, and I am grateful to have them in my life. Thank you Miche, Naty, Lily, Vane, Abel, Chris, Arianna, and Elio.

Finally, I am thankful for the graduate assistantship I was afforded throughout my years at FIU. The assistantship allowed me to pursue my master's and doctoral degree.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

THE ACTIVATIONS OF ACTIVISM: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT

by

Gerson Sanchez

Florida International University, 2021

Miami, Florida

Professor Benjamin Baez, Major Professor

The purpose of this ethnography is to explore cultural context of college student activism, especially as it relates to identity. Much has been said about student activism in the higher education literature, but this literature has two major problems: first, it presupposes a pre-cursive existence of identity, and, second, it disconnects meaning-making from action. With regard to the first problem, activism scholars tend to take categories such as race, class, gender, and sexuality as given, thus reducing individuals to biological differences for the purposes of study. Instead of questioning how identities are created and constructed, such studies presuppose markers of identity as natural. The second problem relates to methodology. Many activism studies in higher education focus solely on interviews, which requires one to assume that meaning-making reflects and predicts actual practices, which is often not the case.

My ethnographic study explores how cultural assumptions about identity are actually put into practice. Through myriad data sources, including prolonged interviews with research participants, participant observations, autoethnographic story-telling, and materials from popular culture, collected over a ten month period, this ethnography uncovers activation as central to student activism. Activism entails a combination of

“active” and “ism,” as such, activism reflects a concern with the ways people are drawn out, moved, or, in other words, activated to political action through various identity understandings, engagements and interactions, and political relations.

Such activations can be understood through the prism of emotions. In particular, fear of oppression, commitments to a loved one, and outrage at injustice are emotions that particularly activate college students into political engagement when these students come from marginalized populations. But while emotions have the capacity to activate, emotions can also deactivate, as when anger subsumes one into possibly destructive behavior, or a bad break-up leads some to become less active. Emotions, therefore, can entice or inhibit student activism.

An ethnographic study of activism attends to cultural practices and what subtends them. One major implication of my ethnography for anyone working with college students and activists is the need to pay attention to the role of appeasement as it relates to activism. Activism is often a response to an injustice, and so it might be understood as a response to that which causes pain. Thus, the alleviation of pain might lead to appeasement and to a certain kind of happiness. Appeasement may obstruct negative emotions that lead to deactivation or to problematic forms of political engagement.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTON

Happy thoughts are not the first thing that comes to mind when I think of the year 2020. Two horrific issues come to mind. First, the coronavirus has affected and killed countless people around the world, particularly the most vulnerable in our societies. I remember when I first heard about the virus, senior citizens and individuals with health-related issues were considered among the most susceptible to the virus. Additionally, I thought of the ways race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and disabilities also contribute to the susceptibility of contracting the virus.

The second horrific issue is police brutality, specifically the murder of George Floyd. In the wake of George Floyd's vicious murder, I was one of the many young people who played a role in organizing protests around my city. I marched on the streets, blocked major highways and bridges, and in turn I was confronted and threatened by those who purport to protect and serve us: the police.

These are the two main issues that come to mind when I think of 2020. However, 2020 is not the first time I have thought about the ways people are affected by injustices. When I was a child, my mother engaged in advocacy work with those who our society categorizes as “homeless.” I saw her spend laborious hours helping those who are often pushed to the periphery of our society. Early in my life, I also learned about immigration, family separation, classism, and racism. And despite not having the words to describe these concepts at the time, I quickly learned that many people are subjected to violence in one way or another. In a way, therefore, I began doing research for this study at an early age.

Indeed, there was a time when I did not know how to describe my thoughts about injustice, but now I do. I think that in many ways, this dissertation became a medium to grapple with my own despair and feelings regarding the condition of the world. Which is why in this study, I will explore a culture of activism. More specifically, the purpose of this study is to analyze the way student activism is conceptualized and enacted, particularly in response to social injustices. In this study, I am also interested the role of emotions in relation to the construction of social identity and, of course, activism.

Therefore, I begin this chapter with a brief literature review to address why a study like mine is necessary. Next, I outline both the methodological approach and the research questions that guide this study. Subsequently, I address the significance and implications of my research. Following this section, I highlight the delimitations of my study. Next, I define key terms that are central to my work. Finally, I end this chapter by outlining the organization my dissertation.

Problem Statement

In the higher education literature, much has been said about the activisms enacted by college students, particularly in relation to identity. For example, Robert Rhoads studied the response by women at Mills College when the administration attempted to admit undergraduate men. Rhoads also investigated LGBTQIA activism at Penn State when a computer message was disseminated arguing for the "killing [of] homosexuals."[1]

Interested in queer students of color, Annemarie Vaccaro and Jasmine Mena utilized qualitative interviews to learn how student activists cope with family, academic, and activist demands.[2] In addition to qualitative interviews, Rachel Dominguez also incorporated participant observations to explore sweatshop advocacy work among college students.[3] When researching women of color student activists, Chris Linder and Katrina Rodriguez conducted interviews to make sense of identity formation.[4] In their study of queer activists, Kristen Renn also used interviews to explore the relationship between gender/sexual orientation and campus leadership.[5] These studies about college student activism in relation to identity are undoubtedly important. And yet, there are two main problems that stand out from this body of work: the presumption of pre-discursive existence and a disconnect between meaning-making and action.

---

[1] Robert A. Rhoads, *Freedom's Web: Student Activism in the Age of Cultural Diversity* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 628-632.

Regarding pre-discursive existence, despite good intentions, much of the aforementioned literature inadvertently naturalize difference. Many of these scholars take categories such as race, class, gender, and sexuality as given. For example, Vaccaro and Mena state that their "phenomenological study sought to understand the essence of the experience of being a queer student of color in a predominately White LGBTQ activist group."[6] Throughout their analysis, Vaccaro and Mena take identity descriptors such as sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity as natural. That is, in their work, Vaccaro and Mena do not explore the way markers of social differences (e.g., sexual orientation, race, ethnicity) are created or produced in the first place. They take such social identities as given rather than explain how they are produced in the first place.

---

[2] Annemarie Vaccaro and Jasmine A. Mena, "It's Not Burnout, *It's More*: Queer College Activists of Color and Mental Health," *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health* 14, no. 4 (2011): 339-367, 348-352.

[3] Rachel Fix Dominguez, "U.S. College Student Activism During An Era of Neoliberalism: A Qualitative Study of Students Against Sweatshops," *The Australian Educational Researcher* 36, no. 3 (2009): 124-138, 130.

[4] Chris Linder and Katrina L. Rodriguez, "Learning From the Experiences of Self-Identified Women of Color Activists," *Journal of College Student Development* 53, no. 3 (2012): 383-398, 388.

[5] Kristen A. Renn, "LGBT Student Leaders and Queer Activists: Identities of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queen Identified College Student Leaders and Activists," *Journal of College Student Development* 48, no. 3 (2007): 311-330, 316.

[6] Vaccaro and Mena, "It's Not Burnout," 340.

This is not to say that differences do not exist. Differences are real because our society makes them real. In fact, our society decides that certain differences are more acceptable than others. Identity descriptors are historical projects, yet scholars often inadvertently assume that individuals are reducible to identity differences (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation). Studies all too often utilize social science research and unintentionally reduce "individuals to biological difference for the purposes of study."[7] Instead of questioning how identities are created and constructed, such studies presuppose sexuality and race as natural definitive of identity.

Such reductionist claims are dangerous. Nolan Cabrera argues that conceptualizing race and ethnicity as "natural" has had deleterious effects on people of color.[8] One example is the belief that people of color are naturally inferior. This dominant ideology has been utilized to justify the subjugation of various racial and ethnic groups. Sandra Bartky also contends that heteronormativity and notions of gender were political constructions institutionalized through the patriarchy power to oppress.[9] As such, much of the research on the "other" in higher education fails to address how differences are made recognizable and brought into existence through discourse and, in my case, also through activist practices. Joan Scott encourages us to not accept difference as given but rather to explore the way difference operates and is established.[10] Studies that fail to question difference end up creating and reproducing not only the "difference it purports to describe" but also essentialist notions of being. [11] Following Susan Talburt, we must be skeptical of "requirements" that comprise an "essence" of identities.[12] Therefore, essentialist arguments can be dangerous, for they reduce the self to a static monolith, thus foreclosing who and what one can become.

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[7] Benjamin Baez, "The Study of Diversity," *The Journal of Higher Education* 75, no. 3 (2004): 285-306, 286.

[8] Nolan L. Cabrera, *White Guys on Campus: Racism, White Immunity, and the Myth of "Post-Racial" Higher Education*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019), 9.

[9] Sandra L. Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" in *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance,* ed. Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 25-45, 34.

I would like to point out, however, that studies such as the one carried out by Vaccaro and Mena are not malicious. Sometimes it is important to treat these identities as essentialist for the purposes of certain political projects. In their study, Vaccaro and Mena are highlighting the various stressors that affect queer activists of color. This type of work is clearly important. Following Gayatri Spivak, Elisabeth Eide has stated that there are moments when "strategic" essentialism can be used for strategic purposes in order to achieve certain political objectives.[13] For activist purposes, my research participants also at times naturalized difference.

Researchers, including myself in this study, in certain moments may need also to naturalize differences deliberately for purposes of specific political projects (such as advocating for better healthcare policies for minoritized populations). My point here is that when we can, we should avoid naturalizing difference and instead explore the way identities based on social differences are constructed. Therefore, throughout my study, particularly the chapters that deal with emotions, I intend to have readers think through the ways identity is constructed through frameworks of emotions.

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[10] Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Difference," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 773-797, 777.

[11] Baez, "Study of Diversity," 286.

[12] Susan Talburt, *Subject to Identity: Knowledge, Sexuality, and Academic Practices in Higher Education*, (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 2000), 3.

[13] Elisabeth Eide, "Strategic Essentialism and Ethnification: Hand in Glove," *Nordicom Review* 31, no. 2 (2010): 63-78, 76.

The second problem associated with the activism literature in the field of higher education relates to methodology. It seems that many studies focusing on meaning-making primarily have relied on solely interviews. This in turn requires us to assume that those meanings reflect practices. However, such meanings may not reveal how understandings are actually put into practice in the lives of activists. Yes, qualitative interviews are important, but we might also be able to learn more from them if other sources of data are incorporated—not for the purposes of putting forth positivist claims about certainty and truth but for deeper insight than simply asking individuals how they make sense of the world. Therefore, drawing from myriad data sources, in concert with more prolonged engagements with research participants, my ethnography reveals new and unique information.

In this section I highlighted two problems with the activism literature: the presumption of pre-discursive existence and a possible disconnection between meaning-making and action. Because much of higher education literature on activism naturalizes difference associated with social identity, through ethnography I explored the way identity and activism are constructed, particularly through a framework of emotions. My ethnographic approach connected meaning-making to action. Given what is currently happening in the world, where all kinds of activisms have occurred on all sides of the political spectrum, a study such as mine is particularly timely.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore activism as a cultural phenomenon, with five student activists (including myself) providing key points of departure. Because I am interested in putting forth a cultural analysis of activism, ethnography was the most appropriate methodological approach. According to John Creswell, ethnography is deemed as methodologically appropriate when the study aims to describe and understand the "beliefs, language, behaviors, and issues facing [a cultural] group."[14]

According to John Van Maanen, the term ethnography denotes: (a) a method of study and (b) the result of the respective study.[15] As a method, ethnography refers to the ways data are collected. As a method of study providing an in-depth understanding of a culture of student activism, my dissertation, for example, utilizes a variety of data sources: formal and informal interviews, formal ones with my participants and informal ones with others (e.g., professors, friends, etc.); casual conversations; text and Instagram messaging; participant observations at various events and places and field notes (these notes were taken in and after both observations and interviews); autoethnographic data (fieldnotes relating to personal experiences and reflections captured in journal entries); artifacts derived from social media (Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube posts, which include memes, writings, online articles and blogs, and videos) and from materials from popular culture (such as biographies, sitcoms, cartoons, and films); and scholarly materials, such as research on students, activism, identity, race, and so forth.

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[14] Ibid., 94.

[15] John Van Maanen, "An End to Innocence: The Ethnography of Ethnography" in *Representation in Ethnography,* ed. John Van Maanen (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 1-35, 4.

As I stated before, my goal in this study was to offer a cultural analysis of student activism. As such, I have used myriad kinds of data and other supports throughout my study. When understood in terms of results, the ethnography is the written representation of how the researcher interprets the proposed culture. The ethnography, following van Maanen, is as a constructed report, one created by the researcher to argue that something (e.g., a culture) is possible. An ethnography, then, accounts for the specific compositional practices employed by the researcher in order to fashion a cultural portrait.[16] By analyzing numerous sources of data, I outlined the way I conceptualized a culture of activism as I understood it in my study.

Research Questions

Using ethnographic methods, my study of student activism addressed three central questions:

1) What is activism?
2) How do emotions work as activating and deactivating events in activism?
3) How do emotions work in the activism associated with addressing injustices relating to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation?

Statement of Significance

In this study, I have attempted to advance the way activism is conceptualized in higher education research. Indeed, activism has been defined in numerous ways by many scholars. Some scholars even distinguish between activism and political organizing. Building on their work, I suggest that what undergirds both activism and political organizing are activations. Quickly, activation in my study refers to the ways people are moved, induced, and compelled to act for the purposes of helping to alleviate social injustice. My research can help scholars and other higher education professionals understand how activism works for students, as well as the roles of power, emotions, and identity in such activism.

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[16] Ibid., 5.

More specifically, my study should encourage readers to explore the way individuals are activated or deactivated, whether for good or evil. We saw with the capitol riots on January 6, 2021, in Washington D.C., the effects of activation. The individuals who participated in these riots were activated by numerous reasons, one of them being Donald Trump. Therefore, we might understand Former President Trump as an activator, as someone who has the capacity to influence the movement of others. Interestingly, social media was an integral tool utilized by Former President Trump to activate the masses.

One social media tool that I have utilized to activate has been WokeWednesdays.[17] WokeWednesdays, as I discuss in Chapter Nine, is a powerful tool in terms of activation. Parrhesia, the courage to speak and listen in spite of risks and consequences, also contribute to the activating dynamics of WokeWednesdays. Yes, the posts I make represent an act of courage. I am often harassed in comments and messages because of my posts. But listening is also a form of courage. WokeWednesdays followers listen to the truths I put forth, in turn, I also listen to them, even when the comments and messages are hurtful. This parrhesiastic relationship that I build with the followers, then, are indicative of courage, because in spite of backlash, my goal is always to activate in some capacity.

---

[17] WokeWednesdays is an Instagram page and show I created in 2017, to address social injustices.

Therefore, at a fundamental level, my study reflects a concern with the ways activation (deactivation too) moves, shapes, restricts, halts, and silences behavior. Through my study, I hope to play a role in activating those who read this work. This goal of activating others through my study assumes that research can be used for the purposes of activating others to seek redress for social wrongs. Scholarship and research might also represent what Eddie Glaude calls the "elsewhere."

The elsewhere refers to a "physical or metaphorical place that affords the space to breathe, to refuse adjustment and accommodation to the demand of society, and to live apart, if just for a time, from the deadly assumptions that threaten to smother."[18] Producing research can be a cumbersome endeavor. But also, research may serve as a metaphorical place, where we might find refuge and accommodation, particularly in times like this, when injustice flourishes more openly, as the last four years have made clear to many of us.

Delimitations/Assumptions of Study

In my study, I was concerned with college student activism. However, I did not focus on right-wing college student activism because it is my belief that it is motivated by anti-justice and illiberal activations. My study was driven by the belief that the world should be made a more just place. In addition to exploring a culture of social-justice activism, the overriding goal in my dissertation was to also put forth an argument that we should be encouraging activations of actions that promote social justice. Right-wing activism is antithetical to my moral beliefs.

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[18] Eddie Glaude, *Begin Again*, (New York, NY: Crown, 2020), 130.

More specifically, my study was concerned with social justice premised on social identities, such as those associated with race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. While my study draws from myriad data sources, it did not focus on graduate students or higher education professionals (e.g., faculty and administrators). My study was concerned only with undergraduate activists, and it intentionally engaged with students who understood themselves as being involved in political work.

Definitions

The concept of identity was important in my study. There were various identities to which I made reference, particularly those relating to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Following Foucauldian ideas, I conceptualized identity as a type of subjectivity. Building on the work of Michel Foucault, Barbara Cruikshank understands subjectivity as "conscience, identity, or self-knowledge."[19] Thomas Lemke suggests that a subjectivity or an identity, can be understood in terms of a "process of becoming."[20] In this way, we might understand identity as the way one understands the self. One understands oneself in ways that are not static, but, rather, always changing. For example, one might understand oneself as a "straight man" at one point but later might come to identify as a "gay man." As such, identity in my dissertation, refers to an ongoing process of knowing and representing the self.

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[19] Barbara Cruikshank, *The Will To Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 21.

[20] Thomas Lemke, *Foucault's Analysis of Modern Governmentality: A Critique of Political Reason*, trans. Erik Butler, (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2019), 275.

I also distinguished between activism and activation. *Activism* requires "an imaginative or creative element—the ability to understand ourselves as other than we are…[and] involves a determined intervention into the normative processes and practices that govern the world in which we live."[21] Therefore, activism can manifest in numerous ways, including forms of protest (i.e., marches, boycotts, sit-ins, etc.). *Activation* refers to the ways people are moved to activism. This is not to say that people are moved instantaneously. Rather, activation can happen at any moment after an event. It could be sparked by a memory or a situation that moves someone to act in a particular way. For example, an individual might read a book that moves them to think and act differently either at the moment or sometime later. As such, reading the book might be what activates that individual to engage in political work.

Activation, as a potential force, like power, is everywhere and in everything; it is omnipresent. *Power* is everywhere because it is "produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another."[22] Power, then, is found in the effects and contestations associated with actions but also in relations between individuals and things. Activation, similarly, as potential, might inhere in inanimate objects, memories, people, or emotions. So everyone and everything has the capacity to activate. In my study, I unpack this concept further, particularly in Chapter Five.

Finally, in my study, I capitalized racial and ethnic descriptors (e.g., White, Black, Latinx, etc.). First, I did this to distinguish between racial descriptors and colors.

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[21] Aaron Kuntz, *Responsible Methodologist: Inquiry, Truth Telling, and Social Justice*, (Walnut, CA: Left Coast Press, 2015), 28.
[22] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 93.

But, more importantly, I did this in order to center the racial or ethnic category as a label, as that which is assigned. As I argue throughout this dissertation, race is not natural; it is a political and social construct. As such, the racial descriptor (like other social markers) is a political label that is assigned to people, and people even assign the label to themselves when they identify as, Black women, for example. In the case of the White racial descriptor, however, it is all too often decentered. Whiteness tends to operate as an invisible racial identity. Because Whiteness is the category that is the least racially-centered, it particularly warrants being capitalized in order to center it.

Overview of the Dissertation

In this initial chapter, I have suggested that injustices continue to exist. Activism is one of the ways individuals respond to and confront injustice. And while much has been said about activism in the higher education literature, I explained why my ethnographic study, and its theoretical underpinnings, extends and questions current understandings of activism. In the next chapter, I provide a historical overview of student activism. Additionally, I explore the distinctions between activism and organizing. In this second chapter, I also provide a brief overview of the notion of activation and deactivation. I conclude the chapter by addressing the methodological limitations of prior research addressing student activism and social identity. In doing so, I make the case that ethnography is a more appropriate methodology for studying activism.

In Chapter Three, I offer an in-depth explanation of my methodological choices. In this chapter, I also highlight the numerous sources of data that provided the bases for the arguments in my study. I end the chapter by describing the way I created the themes and codes that structure this study. Because my research participants are vital aspects of my study, I dedicate Chapter Four to sharing brief profiles and biographical statements of each research participant. These profiles will help contextualize what the research participants say throughout the rest of my study.

Chapter Five provides a detailed analysis of what I call *activation*. I argue that activation is the element that undergirds both activism and organizing. In fact, activation is the most important trait within a culture of activism. I also explain the role of what I called the activator. Like activation, the activator is an individual who carries the capacity to move others for political purposes. While anyone can be an activator, I suggest that the archetypical activators within a culture of activism are the artist and the organizer. I also indicate that whether for good or evil, activators are dangerous.

In Chapter Six, I begin to address the role of emotions within activism. I argue that emotions can shape our behaviors, leading us to engage in social justice endeavors. Emotions, however, might also deactivate us, thus restricting movement. Therefore, I dedicate the next three chapters to different emotions. In Chapter Seven, I discuss the role of fear in the life of the activist. In Chapter Eight, I elaborate on anger and both its productive (activating) and unproductive (deactivating) capabilities. In Chapter Nine, I address the connection between love and rage. In each of these three chapters on emotions, I posit that emotions can structure the way we come to conceptualize identity regarding race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, as well as the activism that results from such conceptualization.

In the tenth chapter, I take an autoethnographic approach and analyze my own attempts to activate through WokeWednesdays. WokeWednesdays is a social justice Instagram page I created in 2017. I reflect on some of the ways I attempted to shape behavior and on the seductive capacity of neoliberalism in relation to activist work. Finally, in Chapter Eleven, I share my significant findings, implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is comprised of three sections. First, I begin with *a* history of college student activism. I focus on the type of student activism which concerns itself with social justice, particularly in relation to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. By this I mean, the type of activism that seeks to create a more inclusive world. As such, I do not address right-wing forms of activism. This historical overview focuses on student forms of protests, which seems to be how much of student activism is conceptualized in higher education literature. This is another reason why a study like mine is necessary. By focusing more on traditional forms of student activism, researchers have missed what undergirds activism and organizing in the first place, activations.

Second, I address the distinction between “activism” and “organizing.” Many scholars have offered various definitions regarding these concepts. I propose that the notion of activation is what undergirds both these concepts. I also suggest that the potential for activation, like power, is relational, thus, everywhere. Additionally, I introduce the concept of deactivation. Before concluding the chapter, I provide an overview of methodologies used in studies relating to student activism and social identity. By providing this overview, I make the case that an ethnography concerning a culture of activism can offer a different kind of insight into the field of higher education. My goal in this literature review is to justify why a study such like mine can be a vital contribution to the study of student activism.

A History of Student Activism

In the beginning stages of college education in what would later become the United States, external factors such as war, particularly the American Revolution, led students to protest. To express their opposition to the war, students boycotted British goods and burned statues of British leaders.[1] During the Civil War, Harvard students were expelled for protesting the draft.[2] Evidently, protesting war is a long-standing tradition of college student activism. Other forms of dissent were directed at university administration and faculty. At universities during the 1800s, students rioted because of disagreements with university leadership. According to Christopher Broadhurst, violence was a key aspect that characterized student protest during this time.[3]

Beginning in the 1900s, political student organizations became more common in the United States. In 1905, the Intercollegiate Socialist Society (ISS) was founded. The ISS was an organization comprised of leftist students like Upton Sinclair and Walter Lippman.[4] ISS spread throughout elite colleges in the United States. By 1917, ISS had sixty chapters and over 2,000 members. This organization also had its own journal: the *Intercollegiate Socialist*. This journal addressed topics pertaining to socialism and university affairs.[5] At the outset of the 20th century, then, we begin to see that part of the way students made meaning of class was by addressing working-class issues through socialist thought. At some universities, ISS chapters also led efforts to build unions for student employees and to keep military programs off-campus.[6]

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[1] Christopher Broadhurst, "Campus Activism in the 21st Century: A Historical Framing," *New Directions for Higher Education*, no. 167, (2014): 3-15, 4.

[2] Philip G. Altbach and Patti Peterson, "Before Berkeley: Historical Perspectives on American Student Activism," *The Annals of the American Academy*, (1971):1-14, 2.

[3] Broadhurst, "Campus Activism," 4.

[4] Ibid., 2.

[5] Ibid., 3.

Socialist and communist organizations were popular in the early 20th century in the United States. In addition to the ISS, the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL) developed in 1907. By 1913, this organization's membership reached 4,300 members and 112 chapters throughout the United States. YPSL focused more on political campaigns, usually supporting socialist candidates.[7] In 1939, one of the largest student leftist groups was The Young Communist League, comprised of 22, 000 members. In the 1930s, however, one of the most salient issues for college students was a concern with peace. In 1933, students at Oxford university pledged to not fight for their country. Known as the "Oxford Pledge," this act incited or activated students around the world to also take the pledge. On American campuses, part of protesting included peace strikes and purposely missing class to attend peace and antiwar rallies.[8]

In the 1930s, racial collaboration increased between White and Black students. Before then, Black students had already begun to create their own organizations. In their 1960s study of college students, Mahlon Smith, Norma Haan, and Jeanne Block categorized five types of "involved/uninvolved" students. The three types of "involved" students were categorized as constructivists, dissenters, and activists. Uninvolved students were classified as inactive and conventionalists. The amount and type of activities characterized how students would be classified. For example, members of fraternities and sororities would typically fall under the "conventionalist" category, given their low participation in political events.[9] This argument, however, seems to contradict the depiction of Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs).

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[6] Ibid., 5.
[7] Altbach and Peterson, "Before Berkeley," 3.
[8] Broadhurst, "Campus Activism," 5.

At the turn of the century, the first Black collegiate fraternity was founded at Cornel University.[10] Since Black students were discriminated by White fraternities, Black students started their own organizations with a purported focus on racial uplift and student retention. Originally, Alpha Phi Alpha, in particular, did not begin with intentions of becoming a fraternity. This group, comprised of young Black men, was initially a social/study club. By working in White fraternity houses, these Black students learned that keeping old class tests would serve as useful study guides for incoming Black students.[11] These students also learned the inner workings of college fraternity life. The desire to become a fraternity created schisms, leading two young men to resign from the study group.[12]

Joel Rosenthal has analyzed Black approaches to activism throughout the twentieth century, particularly the oscillation between assimilation and Black nationalism. Regarding sit-ins, Rosenthal argued that this tactic represented a desire to be included in White, middle-class American life.[13] By establishing themselves as a Greek organization, Alpha Phi Alpha went against their purported ideals of racial uplift because it marginalized other Black men on campus. Historically and presently, the term "uplift" is complex and full of contention among Black communities. Kevin Gains argues that part of what makes the concept of "uplift" contentious is that Black elites have sought to claim "status, moral authority, and recognition of their humanity by distinguishing themselves, as bourgeois agents of civilization, from the presumably underdeveloped Black majority."[14]

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[9] Mahlon B. Smith, Norma Haan, and Jeanne Block, "Social-Psychological Aspects of Student Activism," *Youth & Society* 1, no. 3 (1970): 261-288, 265.

[10] Matthew W. Hughey, "Crossing the Sands, Crossing the Color Line: Non-Black Members of Black Greek Letter Organizations," *Journal of African American Studies* 11, (2007): 55-75, 65.

[11] Stefan Bradley, "The First and Finest: The Founders of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity," *in Black Greek-Letter Organizations in The 21st century: Our Fight Has Just Begun*, ed. Gregory S. Parks (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 19-40, 22.

[12] Ibid., 23.

[13] Joel Rosenthal, "Southern Black Student Activism: Assimilation vs. Nationalism," *Journal of Negro Education* 44, no. 2 (1975): 113-129, 120.

While levels of education and economic standing have served as distinguishing features between Black elites and those reduced to "underdeveloped" status, colorism has also been a contributing factor. In the early part of the twentieth century, it was not uncommon to have Black social clubs, churches, fraternities, and sororities discriminate against other Black people on the basis of color and hair texture. Various "tests" were conducted for admissions purposes. The "paper bag" test, for example, was used to discriminate against darker-skinned Black people. If Black applicants were darker than brown paper bags, they would be denied entry.[15] The "comb on a string" was another test used to discriminate based on hair texture. Applicants had to walk under a comb hanging from a string; membership was determined on whether their hair would stick or slide out of the comb.[16]

Often, BGLOs are lauded for their legacy of fighting against social injustices. And rightfully so, given their trajectory of combatting racial discrimination in the United States. However, these examples of discriminatory tests point to some of the ways race and class have been understood historically presently in Black social organizations who purport to have a "love for all mankind."[17] This critique is not to disparage the work these organizations have accomplished, but rather, to point out the complexities that undergird race and class, even in the midst of political activism.

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[14] Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 2.

[15] Keith B. Maddox and Stephanie A. Gray, "Cognitive Representations of Black Americans: Reexploring the Role of Skin Tone," *Society For Personality and Social Psychology* 28, no. 2 (2002): 250-259, 250-251.

[16] Patience Denece Bryant, "The Impact of Colorism on Historically Black Fraternities and Sororities" (Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, 2013), 26

Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis have proposed that schools and universities create and reinforce patterns of social class, racial, and sexual identification among students, thus, fostering, perpetuating, and justifying inequality.[18] Not only within higher education, but also outside of higher education, in which such patterns are reproduced between those who get in and those who do not. Following Bowles and Gintis, we might argue that while Alpha Phi Alpha and other BGLOs have been social forces for political change, they too have a complicated past (and present) in regard to identity, both on and off college campuses. What began as an attempt to coalesce young Black men on campus (as it pertains to Alpha Phi Alpha specifically), evolved into a social organization that accepted some Black men, while rejecting others. This has inevitably perpetuated and reinforced racial and class (gender too) schisms among Black students.

Nevertheless, the 1930s was a time when Black and White students began to organize together. The National Student League (NSL) was part of the Young Communist League on campuses. White students believed that Black students should organize with them because of class interests. Representatives from the NSL would travel to southern Black universities to recruit students.[19] A growing concern with war and fascism, for Both Black and White students, characterized much of the 1930s. As I mentioned earlier, protests for peace became popular throughout the 1930s. In 1935, within a span of two weeks, over 650,000 students from various universities protested and held strikes in the name of peace.[20] Amid peace strikes, Black students also began to challenge racist admission policies.

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[17] Bradley, "First and Finest," 36.

[18] Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2011), 11.

[19] Rosenthal, "Southern Black Student Activism," 116.

So far, I have highlighted protests in relation to various perceived injustices. Such injustices have included: war, fascism, classism, and racial injustice. Regarding racial injustice, one of the more notable cases of the 1930s was *Gaines ex rel. Canada v. Missouri.* In 1938 Lloyd Gaines, a Black man, was denied admission to the School of Law at the State University of Missouri. Eventually, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of Gaines. Following the ruling, Gaines disappeared. Marcia Synnott notes that Black men would often be afraid to challenge racist admission policies at historically White universities due to potential ensuing violence from White men.[21] As such, a common strategy between the 1930s and the 1960s was the deployment of Black women in order to challenge racist higher education policies.

Like Black men, Black women also saw education as a means for racial progress. Figures such as Lucile Bluford and Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher were among some of the first Black women to challenge racist policies. According to one of the prominent Black attorneys at the time, Charles Hamilton Houston, the rejection of Black women from higher education, Lucile Bluford in particular, would have more “publicity value” than if a Black man was rejected. Additionally, Synnott adds that part of this strategy was also predicated on the idea that Black women were not considered physical or sexual threats to White college women.[22] Interestingly, through this example, we see how gender was utilized as a means to protest racial injustice.

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[20] Ibid., 117.

[21] Marcia G. Synnott, “African American Women Pioneers in Desegregating Higher Education” in *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement: White Supremacy, Black Southerners, and College Campuses,* ed. Peter Wallenstein (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2008), 199-228, 201.

Black women, as the vanguard of Black racial progress against injustices, dates back to the 1800s. Linda Perkins has argued that by the end of the nineteenth century, the notion of "racial uplift" was synonymous with Black women.[23] This is not to say that Black men did not fight against racial injustice. Nevertheless, we see how Black women, on the basis of gender and sex, were employed as a political strategy to combat segregation in higher education. Following the 1930s, political student movements were undermined due to World War II.[24] Rosenthal notes that Black participation in the war "merely made participants more aware of the disparities between American ideals and realities."[25] Upon return, Black veterans at Lincoln University pushed for the desegregation of Oxford, Pennsylvania. Rosenthal argues that their method of non-violent protest would eventually serve as a prototype for the upcoming protests of the 1960s.

The 1960s is perhaps the most notable epoch of student activism in American higher education. As Philip Altbach points out, injustices relating to racism (civil rights) and war (Vietnam war), contributed to much of the student protests throughout the 1960s.[26] The Civil Rights Movement is often understood to have taken place from the time of Brown v. Board of Education (1954) to the time of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.[27] Various strategies were utilized in the 1960s, many of them reminiscent of earlier periods. The term "strategy" is important here becomes it seems that this is how activism is typically conceptualized. Strategy also implies a certain intentionality. So far, much of the literature that I have addressed seems to conceptualize college student activism as intentional strategies that are used for political disruptions.

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[22] Ibid., 201.

[23] Linda M. Perkins, "The Impact of the 'Cult of True Womanhood' on the Education of Black women," *Journal of Social Issues* 39, no. 3 (1983): 17-28, 25.

[24] Broadhurst, "Campus Activism," 6

[25] Rosenthal, "Southern Black Student Activism," 117.

[26] Philip G. Altbach, "Perspectives on Student Political Activism," *Comparative Education* 25, no. 1 (1989): 97-110, 104.

Such strategies might include different forms of protests: boycotts, sit-ins, and marches. I hope to expand this limited understanding of activism throughout my study. Nevertheless, one particular strategy that became popular during this time were sit-ins. Sit-ins were a common tactic, as noted in Greensboro, North Carolina. In 1960, four Black freshmen from North Carolina A&T took a non-violent approach (i.e., sit-ins) to challenge a "Whites only" section in a drug store. From then on, sit-ins became a signature form of protest throughout the 1960s to challenge racist policies.[28]

In the 1960's, organizations such as SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) also came to fruition. At the time, Ella Baker was the executive director for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Baker called for a student conference at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, in April 1960. Baker saw a need to bring students together, particularly those who were engaging in political work, such as sit-ins. Unlike the SCLC, which was centered around Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., SNCC sought to establish a different type of leadership model; one that was more group-centered. As such, the students were responsible for the organization and Baker took the role of advisor. SNCC became a grass roots organization that used a non-violent approach to protest racial discrimination throughout this period of unrest.[29]

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[27] Peter Wallenstein, *Higher Education, and the Civil Rights Movement: White Supremacy, Black Southerners, and College Campuses*, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2008), 10.
[28] Rosenthal, "Southern Black Student Activism," 119.

In addition to sit-ins, civil disobedience also became one of the main forms of protest throughout the 1960s.[30] Seymour Lipset and Philip Altbach argue that lessons from the civil rights movement made the University of California, Berkeley possible.[31] Like in prior years, students continued to be displeased by *in loco parentis.* At some universities, dress codes were enforced, length of hair was policed, and facial hair was not allowed.[32] Students began to protest and rally across the country, Berkeley being one of the most memorable examples.

The Free Speech Movement (FSM) began at Berkeley in 1964 when the university administration denied the use of a section of campus to students. This place on campus had typically been used by students to collect funds and recruit participants for off-campus events such as civil rights demonstrations. When a student leader from the Congress of Racial Equity (CORE) was arrested, students revolted. Over 600 students blocked the police vehicle which held the student for over 30 hours; another 700 students occupied a campus building. Students had to be pulled out by police; this inevitably resulted in shutting down the campus for a few days.[33]

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[29] Joan E. Charles, “Ella Baker and the SNCC: Grassroots Leadership and Political Activism in Nonhierarchical Organization,” (Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 2007), pp. 175-185.
[30] Seymour Martin Lipset and Philip G. Altbach, “Student Politics and Higher Education in the United States,” *Comparative Education Review* 10, no. 2 (1966): 320-249, 321.
[31] Ibid., 321.
[32] Broadhurst, “Campus Activism,” 7.
[33] Lipset and Altbach, “Student Politics,” 322.

During this time, other universities also experienced student movements with a focus on student rights.[34] Such movements allowed for newly formed Black student organizations to advocate for hiring Black faculty and creating African diaspora programs. This also inspired women's movements, other racial minority groups (e.g., Latinx and Asian students) to fight for campus rights, and also other minoritized populations such as LGBTQIA students. The Gay Liberation Movement thrived in the 1970s, however, it was the Stonewall Riots in Greenwich Village in 1969 that served as a powerful impetus for the movement.

Despite not being led by student activists, Stonewall is noted as a key marker that helped assert student activists concerned with gay liberation.[35] Elsewhere, Robert Rhoads argues that in 1974, when “homosexuality” was finally removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-II as a form of mental illness, many individuals began to feel more comfortable with their respective sexuality. Following this, administrators and faculty around the country were forced to rethink their policies and practices affecting LGBTQIA students.[36]

Another historic movement that came to the forefront beginning in the 1960s was the American Indian Movement (AIM), also known as the Red Power Movement. For years, Indigenous organizations such as the National Congress of American Indian (NCAI) had been fighting for civil rights. In 1953, for example, a main concern became the Termination Act, signed by President Eisenhower to dissolve the legal status of tribes.[37] As Bruce D'Arcus points out, many of the issues that have characterized Indigenous activism in the United States has pertained to land rights/treaties, identity, and tribal sovereignty.[38]

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[34] Bruce Johnstone, “The Student and His Power,” *The Journal of Higher Education* 40, no. 3 (1969): 205-218, 206.

[35] Robert A. Rhoads, “Student Activism, Diversity, and the Struggle for a Just Society,” *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 9, no. 3 (2016): 189-202, 194.

[36] Robert A. Rhoads, *Freedom’s Web: Student Activism in an Age of Cultural Diversity*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3.

As it pertains to students, Donna Langston argues that unlike White student groups that advised against organizing with anyone over 30 years old, Indigenous youth activists made sure to include their elders for knowledge and mentorship.[39] However, Langston goes on to mention that similar to African American movements, where students separated from older activists to form the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Indigenous youth also separated from NCAI to form the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) in the 1960s.[40]

In addition to domestic concerns, students were also protesting the war. Not only did the Vietnam War incite student anger, but the American invasion of Cambodia also led to multiple protests. In 1970, during a protest at Kent State University, the National Guard opened fire. The results were horrendous, leaving nine injured and four dead.[41] Unlike historically White universities, Black universities endured more violent occurrences in response to student protests. In 1966 at Alcorn A & M, law enforcement used tear gas and clubs to prevent student protests against campus leadership. Numerous students were also murdered by police between 1968 and 1972 at South Carolina State

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[37] Donna Hightower Langston, "American Indian Women's Activism in the 1960s and 1970s," *Hypatia* 18, no. 2 (2003): 114-132, 115.
[38] Bruce D'Arcus, "The Urban Geography of Red Power: The American Indian Movement in Minneapolis-Saint Paul, 1968-70, *Urban Studies* 47, no. 6 (2010): 1241-1255, 1241.
[39] Langston, "American Indian Women's Activism," 115.
[40] Ibid., 116.
[41] Broadhurst, "Campus Activism," 10.

College, North Carolina A & T, Jackson State College, and Southern University A & M College.[42] As a result, many traditional forms of protesting began to decline in the 1970s.

Other forms of political action began to emerge in the 1980s. Volunteering, for example, became popular, particularly in relation to issues regarding homelessness, world hunger, and other social ills.[43] The Divestment Movement in South Africa also became a focal point of student activism in the 1980s.[44] Popular college shows such as *A Different World* aired an episode on divestment. Divestment was also a key issue in the notable film, *School Daze*. Building shantytowns also became a creative way to protest. Urging universities to divest, shanties were built to bring attention to the oppressive nature of apartheid in South Africa. Over 150 institutions were involved in divestment movements. At institutions where protests occurred, 60% "divested at least partially as compared to less than 3 percent at the schools where no protest occurred."[45]

In the 1990s, students continued to use tactics from the past while also incorporating new forms of action. Volunteerism continued throughout the 1990s and increasingly, more than ever before, students became involved in community service activities.[46] Student activism in the 1990s also started to focus on issues pertaining to diversity, identity, and multiculturalism, or what some have pejoratively called, identity politics.[47]

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[42] Rosenthal, "Southern Black Student Activism," 127-128.
[43] Broadhurst, "Campus Activism," 10-11.
[44] Rhoads, "Student Activism," 194.
[45] Braford Martin, "'Unsightly Huts': Shanties and the Divestment Movement of the 1980s," *Peace & Change* 32, no. 3 (2007): 329-360, 353.
[46] Deborah J. Hirsch, "Politics Through Action: Student Service and Activism in the '90s," *Change* 25, no. 5 (1993): 32-36, 32-34.
[47] Robert A. Rhoads, "Student Protest and Multicultural Reform: Making Sense of Campus Unrest in the 1990s," *The Journal of Higher Education* 69, no. 6 (1998): 621-646, 621-623.

Rhoads has pointed to various examples of group identity activism throughout the 1990s. For example, when the administration attempted to admit undergraduate men at Mills College, the women of the institution called for an immediate strike to shut down the college.[48] At Penn State, students protested when an electronic message was disseminated pushing for the "killing [of] homosexuals." Following this message, another event happened at Penn State in which the head coach of the women's basketball team shared with the media that she was against allowing lesbian students on the team. Not only did students galvanize, but faculty and staff also supported these efforts. [49]

Other protests pertaining to identity politics focused more on race and ethnicity. At the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), for example, Chicano students protested in efforts to have a Chicano studies department. At Rutgers University, African American students protested the university president. While explaining the university's admission strategy in 1994, university president Francis Lawrence said that "the average S.A.T. for African Americans is 750. Do we set standards in the future so we don't admit anybody? Or do we deal with a disadvantaged population that doesn't have that genetic, hereditary background to have a higher average?"[50] Despite the efforts of student protest, the university president did not resign. So far, it seems that much of student activism is reactionary. Something usually happens which causes students to resist or push back.

Moving from the 1990s to the 21st-century, many students engaged in pro-affirmative action protests, including a 50,000 person march in Washington D.C.[51]

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[48] Ibid., 628.
[49] Ibid., 632.
[50] Ibid., 635-636.
[51] Rhoads, "Student Activism," 195.

The movement for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) is also a notable movement that began in the 2000s. The purpose of BDS is to challenge Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine.[52] This movement has garnered international student support. Similar to the South Africa divestment movement of the 1980s, students throughout the world have demanded their universities to divest funds from Israeli institutions. Hampshire College in Massachusetts for example, was the first university to divest from companies on the basis of Israeli occupation in Palestine.[53]

Occupy Wall Street (OWS) was another significant movement that began in 2011 where the main concern was income inequality, the greed of corporations, and the top one percent. During OWS, many campuses erupted with student-led protests. Despite their non-violent approach, student activists were pepper-sprayed by law enforcement at the University of California Davis.[54] Utilizing physical violence to quelch student movements is not a new strategy. As we saw, there were many violent backlashes against student activists throughout the 1960s. Such institutional responses can be considered attempts to deactivate (I will address this further momentarily).

One aspect that stands out from OWS is the use of social media. Prior to the start of OWS demonstrations, a Canadian publication, *Adbusters*, posted a blog and an accompanying Tweet with the #OccupyWallStreet hashtag. Once the hashtag began to trend, protests began to emerge around the world.[55] Through the use of social media, organizers and activists were able to communicate and mobilize on an international level. Another movement that came to fruition with the help of social media was #BlackLivesMatter.

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[52] Abigail B. Bakan and Yasmeen Abu-Laban, "Palestinian resistance and international solidarity: the BDS campaign," *Race and Class* 51, no. 1 (2009): 29-54, 30.

[53] Ibid., 43.

[54] Rhoads, "Student Activism," 196.

[55] Mark Tremayne, "Anatomy of Protest in the Digital Era: A Network Analysis of Twitter and Occupy Wall Street," *Social Movement Studies* 13, no. 1 (2014): 110-126, 110-111.

Started by Black and queer women, #BlackLivesMatter began as a hashtag to bring attention to racism, gun violence, misogyny (misogynoir), and police brutality. #BlackLivesMatter began after the murder of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of his murderer, George Zimmerman.[56] Other murders such as Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, and Sandra Bland have fueled the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Hill has noted the central role of the internet and social media throughout the movement. In Ferguson, for example, activists tweeted that police were blinding them with tear gas and smoke bombs. When residents of the West Bank and Gaza saw this, they tweeted uplifting messages and utilized Instagram to offer tips for cleaning their eyes and creating gas masks.[57] Social media, then, served as a means to create global solidarity among young activists.

Although #BlackLivesMatter is not necessarily a campus or student-led effort, the movement has been supported by college students around the country.[58] Unlike past movements, social media has broadened where and how political activism takes place. Other organizations have also come to fruition such as Dream Defenders, Black Youth Project 100, Hands Up United, and Millennial Activists United.

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[56] Rhoads, "Student Activism," 196.

[57] Marc Lamont Hill, *Nobody: Casualties of America's War on the Vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and Beyond*, (New York, NY: Atria Paperback, 2016), 182-183.

[58] Rhoads, "Student Activism," 197.

Part of what has made these movements and organizations unique, Hill argues, is that these groups have embraced "queer, trans, female, and shared leadership, rejected rigid respectability politics, and resisted (to varying degrees of success) the temptation of co-optation by the dominant power."[59] This is a stark fundamental difference from the civil rights era. In addition to these issues, young activists have also focused on other key problems such as climate change and rising tuition prices.[60] It is clear that issues pertaining to race, class, gender, and sexuality continue to be a focal point of student activism.

Up to this point, I have attempted to provide *a* history of social justice endeavors that are characterized as student activism within American higher education. However, it seems that much of what is connoted as student activism actually reflects a concern with various forms of student protest. Therefore, I place an emphasis on *a,* because there are numerous histories of higher education, multiplicities constituted through manifold spaces and times.[61] My goal has not been to essentialize any type of "history," but rather, to use the aforementioned literature as a starting point. I have also demonstrated the numerous ways student activist efforts have addressed race, class, gender, and sexual orientation in higher education. In the subsequent section, I will highlight distinctions that have been made between "organizing" and "activism."

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[59] Hill, *Nobody*, 183.

[60] Jerusha O. Conner, *The New Student Activists: The Rise of Neoactivism on College Campuses*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020), 4.

[61] Doreen Massey, *For Space*, (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 9-11. Massey argues that "history" is often essentialized, thus dismissing and marginalizing the stories of others. By arguing that "space" is a plurality of possibilities, Massey believes we can disrupt a homogenous understanding of history. As such, my hope is not to present *the* history of higher education, but rather, *a* history, as a point of departure.

Organizing and Activism in Higher Education

Throughout American history college students have engaged in various forms of activism. Historically, the campus, as a material, physical place, has been important to the way student activists organize. According to Broadhurst, given the nature of colleges and universities, campuses provide ripe environments for students to engage in activist practices.[62] But what is the difference between “activism” and “organizing” in higher education literature? As I highlighted earlier, toward the end of the nineteenth century American higher education began to see a rise in political student organizations. For political purposes, students began to assemble in a more formalized manner. Through the development of organizations, students assigned leaders, held meetings and conferences, published journals, and established chapters throughout American universities. A distinction arose, that between “organizing” and “activism.” This distinction has increasingly been a topic of debate among those concerned with political activism writ large.

Astra Taylor, a writer for a leftist online magazine, *The Baffler,* attended a conference a few years ago. At the conference, Mark Rudd, a former 1960s student radical, delivered the keynote address. According to Taylor, Rudd addressed his concerns regarding the activism/organizing distinction, or as Taylor notes, between “self-expression and movement building.”[63] According to Rudd, in the 1960s, the term “activist” was used as an invective against student organizers by the university administration and newspaper journalists.

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[62] Broadhurst, “Campus Activism,” 3.
[63] Astra Taylor, “Against Activism,” *The Baffler* 30 (2016): 123-131, 123.

Taylor states, "Rudd told me [Taylor] recently. 'Mindless activists' was the phrase [used by administration and journalists], and Rudd wonders now, half-jokingly, if 'mindless' and 'activist' don't somehow go together."[64] Taylor also conversed with another radical of the 1960s, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz. According to Ortiz, the rise of the term "activist" was about "discrediting the left." Unlike the term activism, organizing has roots in labor unions.[65] Taylor argues many radicals from the 1960s, including student radicals, came from communist or labor families who were involved in grassroots organizing.[66]

This is not necessarily surprising, given that student political affiliations (whether they lean to the right or left), are often related to a strong parental influence.[67] At the end of the 1960s, with the advent of new movements, particularly those regarding identity, the term activism began to be used more frequently. In these debates, there is clearly a concern with the definition and policing of both terms and their political aims. For Ganz, organizing requires fostering relationships and developing initiatives that empower people to gain a "new understanding of their interests, new resources, and new capacity to use these resources on behalf of their interests."[68] Taylor also states that creating political organizations, developing long-term strategies, cultivating and supporting organizational leadership is a fundamental component of political organizing.[69]

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[64] Ibid., 123.
[65] Ibid., 124.
[66] Ibid., 124.
[67] L. Eugene Thomas, "Family Correlates of Student Political Activism," *Developmental Psychology* 4, no. 2 (1971): 206-214, 213.
[68] Marshall Ganz, "What is organizing?" *Social Policy* 33, no. 1 (2002): 16-17. 16.
[69] Taylor, "Against Activism," 126.

Like Taylor, Theresa Aragon de Valdez believes that organizing has historically and presently been the most powerful tool for combatting social injustices.[70] de Valdez believed that organizing should be about assembling a group of people in a "systematic way so as to facilitate the accomplishment of a specific goal or goals."[71] In this sense, organizers must strategically coalesce individuals for social change. Focusing on youth organizing, Ben Kirshner and Shawn Ginwright contended that organizing provides youth with the ability to identify how social issues are conceived for the purposes of taking action in efforts for a better quality of life.[72] Undoubtedly, organizing has been an essential component of political action in American higher education.

The term activism seems to operate a little differently in higher education literature. Despite noting that student activism is a complex phenomenon, Altbach seems to conceptualize student activism in terms of protests, movements, or forms of campus unrest.[73] Similarly, Cerise Glenn refers to protests, rallies, and boycotts as "traditional forms of activism."[74] Christopher Broadhurst and Angel Velez have described student activism as "student resistance" which could encompass a variety of expressions, including organized strikes, demonstrations, or even street theater, as was used by the Youth International Party (Yippies).[75]

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[70] Theresa Aragon de Valdez, "Organizing as a Political Tool for the Chicana," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 5, no. 2 (1980): 7-13, 7.
[71] Ibid., 7.
[72] Ben Kirshner and Shawn Ginwright, "Youth Organizing as a Development Context for African American and Latino Adolescents," *Child Development Perspectives* 0, no. 0 (2012): 1-7, 1.
[73] Altbach, "Perspectives," 97-100.
[74] Cerise L. Glenn. "Activism or 'Slacktivism?': Digital Media and Organizing for Social Change," *Communication Teacher* 29, no. 2 (2015), 81-85, 82.
[75] Christopher J. Broadhurst and Angel L. Velez, "Historical and Contemporary Contexts of Student Activism in U.S. Higher Education," in *Student Activism, Politics, and Campus Climate in Higher Education*, eds. Demetri L. Morgan and Charles H.F. Davis III (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 3-20, 5.

For Rhoads, campus activism is a form of "participatory democracy" where students engage in demonstrations or protests for the purposes of building a multicultural society. Rhoads defines student demonstrations as "visible public protests organized by students to call attention to a particular concern or set of concerns."[76] Protests, for Rhoads, are a "form of activism primarily intended to create organizational disruption as a means to raise public awareness and force institutional change."[77] For each of these scholars, activism acts as an umbrella term encompassing a variety of expressions concerned with student unrest or dissent. Students who engage in such activities are deemed as "activists." According to Cabrera, Matias, and Montoya, this is not uncommon, as most of the higher education literature that focuses on student activism defines acts of student protests as "activism."[78]

In her new book, Jerusha Conner introduces what she describes as "neoactivism." In her argument Conner states that unlike student activists from the 1960s, neoactivists are more intersectional in their political approaches. In this way, neoactivists also understand their efforts as part of a "rich tradition of student activism and struggles for justice, and who have largely coalesced around a shared set of values and a common vision for the future, even as they pursue diverse causes."[79] Additionally, Conner attaches "neo" to activism to highlight the role of neoliberalism in contemporary activism. For Conner, becoming an activist is a developmental process that is shaped by numerous factors that exist both on and off-campus.[80] Similar to Conner, Stewart and Patton also emphasize intersectionality and the importance of acknowledging history.

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[76] Rhoads, *Freedom's Web*, vii.
[77] Rhoads, "Student Protest," 623.
[78] Nolan L. Cabrera, Cheryl E. Matias, and Roberto Montoya, "Activism or Slacktivism? The Potential and Pitfalls of Social Media in Contemporary Student Activism," *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 10, no. 4 (2017): 400-415, 402.
[79] Conner, *The New Student Activists*, 8-9.

In 2018, the conference theme for the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) was *Envisioning the Woke Academy*. To expound on notions of being "woke,"[81]a special issue on activism was published in the *Review of Higher Education*. Whereas other scholars have reserved the category, "activist," for individuals, Stewart and Patton deem the academy itself as an activist. According to Stewart and Patton, the Woke Academy "is *activist*, situates *history as a process of remembering*, is *critically conscious*, and acknowledges the importance of *representation* that is *intersectional* and *transdisciplinary*."[82] It seems that these tenets are what comprise an activist ontology for Stewart and Patton. Julia Mendes and Aurora Chang also differ from traditional understandings of student activism.

Mendes and Chang understand that activism could be defined as "sacrificial acts that lead to individual and collective liberation in the pursuit of social justice…"[83] However, acquiescing to such a definition limits the extent of activism. These scholars note that oftentimes activism is depicted as observable, public acts. In other words, if your activism is not made public for the view of others, then it might not be considered "activism." In their study of undocumented students, Mendes and Chang argue that silent forms of resistance or “unorthodox manifestations of agency,” can and should also be deemed as activism.[84] These scholars argue that if we “consider that being undocumented requires emotional, mental, and physical survival, then we should also consider that such determination (and actions) to survive constitute as a form of activism, too.”[85]

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[80] Ibid., 20.

[81] Currently, the right-wing is activating itself by reappropriating the term, "Woke," or at least trying to. They are linking this term to "cancel culture," "radical left," "radical Democrats," and so on, which is really only meant to deflect attention from its own illiberal practices (e.g., voter suppression, anti-trans policies, etc.) and fascist and nationalist tendencies.

[82] D-L Stewart and Lori. D. Patton, "Note from the Editors," *The Review of Higher Education* 42, (2019): 1-3, 2.

[83] Julia Mendes and Aurora Chang, "Undocumented and Afraid: Expanding the Definition of Student Activism," in *Student Activism, Politics, and Campus Climate in Higher Education*, eds. Demetri L. Morgan and Charles H.F. Davis III (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 60-76, 60.

Departing from traditional forms of activism, Mendes and Chang propose that by broadening the definition of activism, educators and other higher education professionals will be better equipped to address the concerns of undocumented students. Yet, Mendes and Chang feel the need to *legitimize* what counts as activism. And I believe this is part of the danger that comes with attempting to define activism. Instead of opening possibilities, the concern and compulsion to define activism seems to be constraining for both activists and activism. This compulsion with definitions in academic literature is something to wonder about, how at times the attempts to define might be more problematic than helpful.

So far, I have attempted to show some of the ways organizing and activism have been understood in higher education. Some scholars distinguish organizing from activism, while others do not. For some, activism is a limiting approach to social justice work; for others, activism is a term that encapsulates various forms of resistance and subversion. It seems, then, that parts of organizing are active; but parts of activism can also be active. In the next section, I elaborate on the active aspect of organizing and activism. This overview will be brief because activism and what I refer to as, activations, is also the focus of Chapter Five. In the next section I will also provide an overview of power, a concept that has shaped my understanding of activism and activation.

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[84] Ibid., 73.
[85] Ibid., 67.

The Connection Between Activism and Power: Activations

For some, there is a distinction between organizing and activism. Whereas organizing might refer to a strategic, intentional effort to assemble individuals for political purposes, traditionally, activism has been understood in terms of marches, boycotts, and other forms of outward expression which reflect student protest. However, I want to suggest that perhaps what undergirds both these concepts is a concern with the shaping of human conduct.

As I begin to build my argument, I do not wish to focus on narrow conceptualizations of what activism is or can be. Such a position forecloses imagination and inhibits spontaneity. Activism is not rigid or static. Activism is active. In fact, it can activate individuals to move in particular ways. Activism can take any form the contexts, times, or spaces require. Instead of precluding possibilities, I want to consider that we should embrace a multiplicity of activisms.

Following the etymology of the term, activism is a combination of “active” and “ism.” “Active” comes from the Latin term *actus*, or “to drive, draw out or forth, move” (see Etymology Online Dictionary, 2020). “Ism,” implies a system, a practice, or a doctrine. As a reminder, before I continue, this study is a cultural analysis of activism. Therefore, Raymond Williams is also instructive here. Regarding culture, Williams argued that a theory of culture is a “study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life."[86] Building on Williams' definition, I want to suggest that a culture of activism reflects a concern with the ways people are drawn out, moved, or in other words, activated (or deactivated) through various practices, engagements, interactions, and of course, relations. For Michel Foucault, "relation" was a vital aspect of his conceptualization of power.

Foucault wrote that power is omnipresent because it is "produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere."[87] Similar to power, I want to say that activism is relational; it is an encounter with that which activates, which can be anything or anyone, in any space, in any time, and through any medium. Although it can, activism does not necessarily have to be done purposefully or intentionally. Activism also does not have to be an external expression, it can refer to an internalized activation. Activism, at a fundamental level, is about activating, whether it is intentional or not, implicit or explicit.

If organizing refers to a strategic, intentional effort to assemble individuals for political purposes, then activation lies at the root of this. If activism, is understood in terms of marches, boycotts, and other forms of outward expressions that reflect student protest, then activation lies at the root of this. The reason why activation undergirds both concepts is because activation reflects a concern with movement. Concepts such as: "assemble," "organize," "march," protest," "boycott," refer to forms of movements and activities. And since activation refers to the ways people are induced to move, then organizing and activism cannot happen without activating individuals to move. This study is vital to the corpus of student activism literature because it seeks to explore the various ways individuals are activated and also deactivated. As such, I will also introduce the concept of deactivation in the subsequent section.

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[86] Raymond Williams, "The Analysis of Culture," in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* 2nd ed. Ed, John Storey (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 48-56, 52.
[87] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 93.

What About Deactivations?

In this section I will introduce the concept of deactivation. I will provide a few examples to highlight some of the ways universities have attempted to deactivate college students. In the previous section, I proposed that activation pertains to the ways individuals are moved (i.e., activated) through various interactions and relations. Deactivation is about the attempts made in order to obstruct, quelch, or halt movement. There are many ways colleges and universities attempt to thwart student activism. Below, I will provide a more lucid understanding of deactivation by highlighting violent interactions that occurred at Southern and Grambling State University in Louisiana from 1968-1972.

Throughout American history, as I alluded to earlier, student activists have experienced some type of backlash from their respective university. Such backlashes, I propose, can be considered attempts to shape behavior and halt movement or deactivate. At some universities, particularly from the 1960s to 1970s, there were occasions where the university administration called in law enforcement to diffuse (i.e., deactivate) student unrest.[88]

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[88] Rosenthal, “Southern Black Student Activism,” 127.

For example, in 1967 at Grambling State University, 800 students walked out of their classes to protest. The students argued that the university's commitment to the football team hurt the academic mission of the institution. In response to this protest, the university president requested the National Guard at the university. The governor obliged and sent 800 National Guard soldiers. Additionally, the president of the university expelled 31 of the protesters, including the student government president and vice-president. The following year students protested again to demand curriculum changes. Once again, the president of the university requested state assistance and approved a national guard contingent on campus. The president also expelled 29 students and fired three faculty members.[89]

Nearby, at Southern University, students also protested in 1972. The university administration called law enforcement when students occupied the administration building. When police arrived, there were almost 2,000 students surrounding the building. Within moments, police released tear gas on the students. According to the sheriff, some students had small bombs in their possession. Students disagreed with the sheriff and accused the sheriff of lying about the bombs. During the altercation between the police officers and students, loud explosions were heard. Once the smoke cleared, two students were dead.[90]

Bruce Johnstone has pointed out that one of the ways student influence and decision-making, or what he calls "power," is mitigated at the university is through the formation of student organizations.[91] Johnstone insists that the “very nature” of universities foreclose any significant student influence. Attempts to assuage student influence can be understood as attempts to appease students. What appears to be a way of addressing student concerns on behalf of the university could actually be an attempt to appease or even deactivate students. But whereas Johnstone highlights a more subtle way to quelch student movement (e.g., student organizations, student government), I have demonstrated more explicit examples.

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[89] Thomas Aiello, "Violence is a Classroom: The 1972 Grambling and Southern Riots and the Trajectory of Black Student Protest," *The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 53, no. 3 (2012): 261-291, 267-268.

[90] Ibid., 262.

The inclusion of students in institutional committees or student government are subtle attempts either to appease or deactivate students. But the examples of Southern and Grambling are more explicit attempts to deactivate. While all attempts to deactivate may be coercive, not all are violent. In the case of Grambling and Southern, the university administration utilized law enforcement to stop student protest and also to impose fear on students and faculty. As a means to neutralize the opposition (i.e., students and faculty) at Grambling, the university administration expelled students and fired faculty. Such actions expose the authoritarian aspect of deactivation. Through the use of force and expulsion, the university attempted to destroy future possibilities of student protest. But as in the case with Grambling, attempts to deactivate are not always successful. Despite the presence of 800 national guard soldiers in 1967, the students once again protested in 1968.

As I mentioned before, there are many ways colleges and universities attempt to deactivate students, faculty, and staff. Some ways are subtle, others are more explicit.

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[91] Bruce Johnstone, “The Student and His Power,” *The Journal of Higher Education* 40, no. 3 (1969): 205-218, 206.

Some ways to deactivate might be intentional or even unintentional. Nevertheless, because deactivation, like activation, is also relational, the possibility for deactivation is always looming.

Why Ethnography

Before I move on to Chapter Three (methodology), I want to conclude this literature review by making an argument as to why ethnography is the most appropriate methodology for this study. Again, the purpose of this study is to explore a culture of activism. And as I have indicated, I am also interested in the ways social identity relates to a culture of activism. In this section I will provide an overview of the methodologies utilized in studies that address social identity in relation to student activism. By providing this overview, I hope to justify why an ethnographic study on activism in the field of higher education is necessary.

Social identity has been a topic of inquiry by numerous scholars in higher education. Lori Patton, Kristen Renn, Florence Guido, and Stephen Quaye argue that in past decades, social identity in higher education has served as a "central organizing concept for understanding self in society…[and] as a foundation for understanding student development."[92] With the advent of Kimberle Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, higher education scholars began to focus more on the interplay of social classifications of identity (i.e., race, class, gender, and sexuality) in relation to oppression and privilege.[93]

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[92] Lori D. Patton, Kristen A. Renn, Florence M. Guido, and Stephen John Quaye, *Student Development in College: Theory, Research, and Practice,* (San Francisco, CA: Josey Bass, 2016), 71.
[93] Ibid., 75.

For example, Victor Saenz and Luis Ponjuan address issues about Latino males. Grounded in statistical data, Saenz and Ponjuan explored the "underlying social, cultural, structural, and systemic" issues that contribute to the vanishing of Latino men in higher education.[94] Instead of focusing on Latinx students, Nolan Cabrera analyzed White men in college. Over a two-year span, Cabrera interviewed White undergraduate males to explore how these men experience and view race.[95] Still exploring White students, Jenny Stuber utilized Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of capital to analyze the perpetuation of inequality in higher education. Stuber focused on the two "traditional genders" while holding "race, age (all are 'traditional age' students), and enrollment status (all are full-time students)" constant in order to "maximize…empirical and theoretical focus on social class."[96]

In another study, utilizing ethnographic methods (40 interviews, participant observations, and document analysis), Rhoads explored the heterogeneous experiences of gay and bisexual college men.[97] Attempting to understand the experiences of LGBTQIA college students, Jonathan Pryor interviewed five White transgender and genderqueer students at Midwest university.[98] From a quantitative perspective, Jason Garvey, Laura

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[94] Victor B. Saenz and Luis Ponjuan, "The Vanishing Latino Male in Higher Education," *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 8, no. 1 (2009): 54-89, 54.

[95] Nolan L. Cabrera, *White Guys on Campus: Racism, White Immunity, and the Myth of "Post-Racial" Higher Education*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019), 15.

[96] Jenny M. Stuber, *Inside the College Gates: How Class and Culture Matter in Higher Education*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 22-23.

[97] Robert A. Rhoads, "A Subcultural Study of Gay and Bisexual College Males," *The Journal of Higher Education* 68, no. 4 (1997): 460-482, 463.

[98] Jonathan T. Pryor. "Out in the Classroom: Transgender Student Experiences at a Large Public University." *Journal of College Student Development* 56, no. 5 (2015): 440-455.

Sanders, and Maureen Flint used data from the national LGBT alumni survey to examine perceptions of LGBTQ college students who graduated between 1944 and 2013.[99]

In addition to these studies, scholars have also explored the relationship between social identity and student activism. Regarding racial injustice, as I mentioned earlier, political activism can be traced back to the early 1900s with Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs). Currently, furthering the work on race and activism, Matthew Hughey conducted interviews with thirty students to explore tensions among non-Black students in BGLOs. Hughey surmises that understanding the role of non-Black Greeks in BGLOs helps make sense of racial politics on college campuses.[100]

Focusing on women, Rhoads studied the response by women at Mills College when the administration attempted to admit undergraduate men. Rhoads also investigated LGBTQIA activism at Penn State when a computer message was disseminated arguing for the "killing [of] homosexuals."[101] Also interested in queer students, Annemarie Vaccaro and Jasmine Mena interviewed queer students of color in an LGBTQ student organization. These researchers utilized interviews to learn how student activists cope with family, academic, and activist demands.[102] In another study, Rachel Dominguez observed student meetings and interviewed various student activists about sweatshop advocacy work.[103] When researching women of color student activists, Chris Linder and

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[99] Jason C. Garvey, Laura A. Sanders, and Maureen A. Flint, "Generational Perceptions of Campus Climate Among LGBTQ Undergraduates," *Journal of College Student Development* 58, no. 6 (2017): 795-817, 799.

[100] Hughey, "Crossing the Sands," 313-319.

[101] Rhoads, *Freedom's Web,* 628-632.

[102] Annemarie Vaccaro and Jasmine A. Mena, "It's Not Burnout, *It's More*: Queer College Activists of Color and Mental Health," *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health* 14, no. 4 (2011): 339-367, 349.

[103] Rachel Fix Dominguez, "U.S. College Student Activism During An Era of Neoliberalism: A Qualitative Study of Students Against Sweatshops," *The Australian Educational Researcher* 36, no. 3 (2009), 124-138, 130.

Katrina Rodriguez conducted interviews to make sense of identity formation.[104] In their study of queer activists, Renn also utilized interviews to explore the relationship between gender/sexual orientation and campus leadership.[105]

However, we run into two problems with many of the studies that I have outlined: the naturalness of identity and a disconnect between meaning-making and action. Regarding naturalness of identity, despite good intentions, much of the aforementioned literature inadvertently assumes difference to be natural or given. Many of these scholars take categories such as race, class, gender, and sexuality as a priori. In the case of Stuber, she accepts identity descriptors such as race and gender as given. In fact, she states that regarding gender, her study "represent equally the two traditional genders."[106] Instead of exploring or questioning the construction of two genders or how these genders have come to be understood as traditional in the first place, she accepts them as given.

Regarding race, Stuber states that using sampling strategy where she held constant race among other identity markers, enabled her to maximize her "empirical and theoretical focus on social class."[107] As I pointed out in the Chapter One, studies such as these unintentionally reduce individuals to biological difference for the purposes of research. Yes, at times essentializing identity can be important in order to achieve political objects, as in the case with much of activist work.

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[104] Chris Linder and Katrina L. Rodriguez, "Learning From the Experiences of Self-Identified Women of Color Activists," *Journal of College Student Development* 53, 3 (2012), 383-398, 388.

[105] Kristen A. Renn, "LGBT Student Leaders and Queer Activists: Identities of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queen Identified College Student Leaders and Activists," *Journal of College Student Development* 48, no. 3 (2007): 311-330, 316.

[106] Stuber, *Inside the College Gates*, 22.

[107] Ibid., 23.

As researchers especially, we must be careful with the ways we address differences. This is not to say that differences are not real. Differences are real because our society makes them real. Sure, questioning differences can be a difficult task. Nevertheless, where and when we can, we must try to explore how such differences are constituted in the first place. This example highlights the way research reinforces the notion that biological differences are natural.[108] My goal in this study is not to reinforce, but rather, to question how subjectivities are created, particularly, through a framework of emotions. Naturalizing difference is the first problem, but there is another problem as well.

It seems that many studies have relied solely on qualitative interviews. Relying on only one source of data, particularly interviews, is limiting because it assumes that what is said during interviews reflects practices. However, such meanings may not reveal how understandings are actually put into practice in the lives of activists. Incorporating more data sources might provide a more well-rounded picture as to what comprises a culture of activism. An ethnographic approach, then, seems to be an appropriate methodology for this study. Prolonged engagement with participants, in concomitance with myriad data sources, might reveal new information.

Summary

I began this chapter by providing a historical overview of what has been understood as college student activism in the United States, particularly as it relates to notions of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Through this historical overview, I demonstrated that much of what has been considered student activism has been understood in terms of outward expressions, such as protests. Unlike activism, organizing has roots in labor unions and has been widely conceptualized as a more strategic approach, one which attempts to coordinate people in order to address a particular injustice. Ultimately, each concept can be defined in numerous ways. Nevertheless, if organizing refers to a strategic, intentional effort to assemble individuals and activism is conceptualized as marches, boycotts, and other forms of outward political expressions, then I propose that activation is what lies at the root of both concepts.

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[108] Benjamin Baez, "The Study of Diversity," *The Journal of Higher Education* 75, no. 3 (2004): 285-306, 286.

Much has been said about activism and organizing, but the notion of activation offers a unique entry to analyze not only student activism but activism writ large. Activism comes from the Latin term *actus*, which means "to drive, draw out, move." The foundation that undergirds a culture of activism then is activation. Therefore, the culture of activism reflects a concern with the ways people are moved, and even halted (deactivation), for the purposes of political work. Intriguingly, because power is relational, power is everywhere according to Foucault. In this chapter I have begun to propose that like power, activation, or the capacity and potential to move people, is also everywhere, due to its relational quality. So far, I have briefly begun to unpack the concept of activation. However, Chapter Five is dedicated to a full detailed analysis of activation.

Following my discussion on activation and power, I also addressed some of the limitations of prior studies. Whereas previous studies have utilized interviews as their main source of data, I suggested that an ethnography, a methodology that employs numerous sources of data, might provide new and unique information. In this study, I have set out to explore the various ways people are activated (and deactivated) within a culture of activism. Conducting such a study will add a level of nuance to higher education literature. This is a nuance that is highly needed as we continue to engage in social justice endeavors. Failing to understand the role of activation in a culture of activism limits the possibilities of future actions. Before I explore the extent of my argument, I will first need to lay out my methodology, ethnography, which is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN/METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapter I provided a historical overview of higher education literature that pertains to student activism. I proposed that much of what is considered activism in this literature refers to outward expressions such as protests, marches, and boycotts. Unlike activism, organizing is understood as a way to coalesce a group of individuals for a particular political purpose. Next, I explored the distinction between activism and organizing. I argued that perhaps, what undergirds both these concepts is the notion of activation. Because activation refers to the ways people are moved, there can be no activism or organizing without activation. To justify the need for an ethnographic study, I concluded the chapter by highlighting the methodological limitations of previous studies concerned with student activism and social identity

In this chapter I will provide a methodological overview of ethnography. I offer support as to why ethnography is the more appropriate methodological approach for this study. I also outline myriad data sources that inform my dissertation. I conclude this chapter by describing my coding approach which led to the overarching themes of this study: activism and activation, emotions, and identity through emotions. Once again, the purpose of this study is to explore activism as a cultural phenomenon.

Research Questions

Using ethnographic methods, my study addressed three central questions:

1) What is activism?
2) How do emotions work as activating and deactivating events in activism?

3) How do emotions work in the activism associated with addressing injustices relating to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation?

What is an Ethnography?

In a broad sense, ethnographic studies are concerned with the culture of a group of people. For Margaret D. LeCompte and Judith Preissle, ethnography is both a process and a product.[1] Similarly, for John Van Maanen, the term denotes the method of study and result of the respective study.[2] As a method, ethnography refers to the ways data are collected. To provide an in-depth understanding of activism, my dissertation, for example, utilized a variety of data sources (I will provide an in-depth overview of the data sources later in the chapter).

When understood in terms of a result, ethnography refers to the written representation of how the researcher interprets the proposed culture. Therefore, the ethnography is a constructed report, one created by the researcher to propose and argue that something (e.g., a culture) is possible. As stated by Van Maanen, this report accounts for the specific compositional practices employed by the researcher to fashion a cultural portrait.[3] By analyzing numerous sources of data, I outlined the way I conceptualized a culture of activism. To be clear, the report is a fabrication, not the actual culture or anything other than the report. Life happens without reports, recordings, or journal entries. Ethnographies are fictions. They are fictitious, not because they are false or fake but because they are constructed.

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[1] Margaret D. LeCompte and Judith Preissle, *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research*, 2nd ed, (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 2003), 3.
[2] John Van Maanen, "An End to Innocence: The Ethnography of Ethnography" in *Representation in Ethnography*, ed. John Van Maanen (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 1-35, 4.
[3] Ibid., 5.

Interestingly, Clifford Geertz argued that the most vital component of ethnographies is not the techniques utilized to collect data, but rather, the specificity of the report or thick descriptions.[4] A dichotomy of descriptions exists (thin versus thick) for Geertz. Unlike thick descriptions, thin descriptions are somewhat surface level. Citing Gilbert Ryle, Geertz gave the example of a person blinking and addressed the various ways to analyze this act:

> But the point is that between what Ryle calls the 'thin description' of what the researcher (parodist, winker, twitcher...) is doing ('rapidly contracting his right eyelids') and the 'thick descriptions' of what he is doing ('practicing a burlesque of a friend faking a wink to deceive an innocent into thinking a conspiracy is in motion') lies the object of ethnography.[5]

In the researcher's attempt to get at meanings, the interpretive details (thick descriptions) are vital and should resonate with the reader. Quotes, for example, are useful in creating thick descriptions because of their ability to provide a "great deal of contextual information."[6] Through the use of myriad data sources, intertwined with thick descriptions, I hope to create a sense of resonance with readers.

Why Ethnographic Methods for this Study?

My research depicts a concern with the various components that might comprise a culture of activism. Perhaps, a phenomenological approach could have been methodologically appropriate for my study. Phenomenology refers to the study of experiences. It is a methodology that seeks to find the consciousness of what is being studied, or rather, the essence of experiences.[7] This approach requires the researcher to put aside their preconceived ideas to highlight the purity of consciousness under investigation.[8] In my study, this method could be utilized as an attempt to find the essence of what activism is. It would require that I, the researcher, bracket off my preconceived notions to illustrate the core of what entails a culture of activism.

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[4] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973), 6.
[5] Ibid., 7.
[6] Kathryn M. Anderson-Levitt, "Ethnography," in *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research,* eds. Judith Green, Gregory Camilli, Patricia B. Elmore, Audra Skukauskaite, and Elizabeth Grace (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2006), 279-296, 289.

However, I am not interested in proposing a reductionist understanding of activism. A reductionist approach would further restrict and foreclose what activism is and can be. And as I outlined in my literature review, there are already too many limitations placed on what activism is, both within and outside academic circles. My concern in this study is a broader one. It is not a concern with what activism *is* per se, but rather, about the numerous characteristics of activism and the various ways individuals become activated. Phenomenological studies also tend to privilege qualitative interviews as sources of data.[9] I do not wish to privilege any particular source of data in my report. To make an argument about culture, I have incorporated numerous sources of data. Therefore, it seems that ethnography is more appropriate for my study.

According to John Creswell, ethnography is deemed as methodologically appropriate when the study aims to describe how a cultural group works and explores the "beliefs, language, behaviors, and issues facing the group."[10] Specifically, I am interested in a culture of activism. Yes, I used many sources of data, but ethnographic work also involves an extended period of time throughout the data collection process. In my study the data collection process began before I knew for sure where the study was going. On January 17, 2019, I traveled with the FIU student organization, GIG (Global Indigenous Group), to Washington D.C., for the Indigenous People's March. Yes, the purpose of the trip was to support GIG (I too am interested in activism as it pertains to indigenous people) but also to learn more about ethnographic approaches. I stopped collecting data in October 2019. Throughout these ten months I attended numerous events with the participants, wrote reflections, journal entries, exchanged text messages, and collected other materials. The places and spaces where I collected data is understood as the research site in ethnographic work, which I outline in the subsequent section.

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[7] Loren Barritt, Hans Bleeker, Ton Beekman, and Karel Mulderji, "A Phenomenological Approach," *Researching Educational* (1985), 217-227, 217-219.
[8] Ibid., 218.
[9] John Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013), 79.
[10] Ibid., 94.

Research Sites

In ethnographic studies, the research site refers to the area where data are collected. Traditionally, the “field” or research site may have entailed villages or islands.[11] In my study, the research site was an amalgamation of places and spaces. Regarding place, the primary research site was South Florida, Miami. As I mentioned above, I did go to Washington D.C. for a few days with two of my research participants. At times, FIU was the research site. At other times, because activist endeavors also happen outside the confines of the material university, I visited other areas in Miami with the participants. I conducted observations during political meetings, marches, and campus protests. Meetings and conversations were also held with participants in various locations such as churches, the public library, offices on campus, restaurants on and off-campus, my car, and the participants' homes.

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[11] Anderson-Levitt, “Ethnography,” 284.

The places I have listed can be understood as the physical or material surfaces where data was collected. In addition to these places, there were also spaces that comprised the research sites of my study. Doreen Massey argues that space is the "production of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny."[12] Following Massey, we can propose that numerous spaces also inhabited the places mentioned above. Social media, in particular, was also an important space where data were collected in my study. Social media is a space that is produced through the interaction of followers, as is the case with Instagram. In my study social media was a space where I made observations of both the participants and myself.

My chapter on WokeWednesdays makes a nuanced case for social media as space. WokeWednesdays is a social justice show and Instagram page that I created on January 25, 2017. For me, the election of Donald Trump served as an activator. This election propelled me to become more involved as a local activist. At the time of his election, I was also beginning my doctoral program. As a first-generation student, I felt a certain responsibility to share the knowledge I was learning in the classroom with my respective communities. As such, I started WokeWednesdays as a way to address social justice issues. Each week I hosted a show where I invited guests to address various political topics. I hosted over 100 episodes in the span of two and a half years without ever missing a show. Because of my doctoral workload, I took a brief break from hosting the show. However, I recently began hosting the show again. In addition to the show I also make daily social justice posts which include tweets, videos, art, etc. Because WokeWednesdays is a political space where I enact my political activism in an effort to activate others, it is also a viable research site that informs my study.

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[12] Doreen Massey, *For Space*, (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 9.

In addition to Massey's work on space, Elizabeth St. Pierre is also differently instructive regarding what entails the "field" of ethnographic work. St. Pierre brings into question the "when" of the field. St. Pierre articulates that during her fieldwork, she was "in the past-present-future—time was untimely."[13] Following St. Pierre, I argue that the field is constantly being constructed. The field is not static, it is always happening. The "field" in my study was every*when* and everywhere data was collected and analyzed. As a reminder, my study is a cultural analysis of activism, therefore, my work with the participants was but one part of this study.

As such, the when of the field could also be understood as the times I was thinking about my study, dreaming about my work, or reflecting on childhood memories that contributed to my analysis. The field could be those moments where I was watching television which sparked ideas about activism and activations. Working from this perspective allows for a broader and more inclusive understanding of what counts as the research site in both my study and ethnographic work writ large. Nevertheless, my participants played a vital role in my study, which is why in the next section I explain how I was able to recruit each participant.

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[13] Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, "Writing Post Qualitative Inquiry," *Qualitative Inquiry* 24, no. 9 (2018): 603-608, 606.

Participants

In addition to numerous data sources, research participants were also a fundamental aspect of my study. Adhering to the logic of purposeful and convenience sampling, I intentionally selected four students who identify as activists and engage in political work regarding race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.[14] As a point of clarification, I also consider White nationalists as activists who engage in political work regarding race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. However, this type of activism is not the focus of my current study. My study was driven by the belief that the world should be made a more just place. Therefore, I recruited participants who are also interested in creating a safe and inclusive world.

I will be providing more information about the participants in the subsequent chapter. For now, I will briefly introduce each participant. The research participants in my study were recruited from two institutions (a) Florida International University (FIU), a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) located in Miami, Florida; and (b) Broward College (BC) located in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Although one student was from Broward College, none of the observations or conversations took place at BC. In addition to the four participants, given my deep involvement in the study, I also consider myself the fifth participant. Each student chose their pseudonym: Duende, Marwa, Ally (pronounced Ali) Khalil Peralta (Ally going forward), and Bonny Billy. Except for Marwa, I already knew three of the student activists. Every student except for Bonny was born to immigrant parents. Marwa was the only student born outside the United States. She was born in

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[14] Mildred L. Patten, *Understanding Research Methods: An Overview of the Essentials* (Glendale, CA: Pyrczak Publishing, 2004), 45.

Saudi-Arabia to Sudanese parents but came to the United States at the age of two. Marwa is now an American citizen. Because I already knew most of the students, I asked Duende, Ally, and Bonny if they would be interested in being part of my study, they agreed. I was able to recruit Marwa through Duende. My approach to recruiting Marwa can be understood as snowballing.[15] Because of the length and time of my study, I chose prolonged engagements with four students as opposed to less engagement with a larger number of people.

Fieldwork

Now that I have laid out an argument for why ethnographic methods are appropriate for my study, I will now elaborate on the details of my fieldwork. Fieldwork in ethnographic studies refers to the process of data collection. As St. Pierre has addressed, what counts as data is a contentious issue in qualitative research.[16] For the purposes of my study, data refers to the information that is gathered in order to answer research questions.[17] For Creswell, qualitative data can typically be grouped into four groups: observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials.[18] Unlike other forms of qualitative research that privilege one source of data over another, in ethnographic research, data sources should be diverse or eclectic.[19] Ethnographers tend to rely on a combination of the aforementioned data sources.

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[15] Robert C. Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theories and Methods*, 5th ed. (Indian Subcontinent Adaption: Pearson India, 2016), 66.

[16] Elizabeth St. Pierre, “The Appearance of Data,” *Cultural Studies-Critical Methodologies*, 13, no. 4, (2013): 223-227, 224.

[17] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 146.

[18] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 157-159.

[19] LeCompte & Preissle, *Ethnography and Qualitative Design*, 158.

To provide an in-depth understanding of activism, my study utilized numerous data sources: formal and informal interviews, formal ones with my participants and informal ones with others (e.g., professors, friends, etc.); casual conversations; text and Instagram messaging; participant observations at various events and places and field notes (these notes were taken in and after both observations and interviews); autoethnographic data (fieldnotes relating to personal experiences and reflections captured in journal entries); artifacts gathered from social media (Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube posts, which include memes, writings, online articles and blogs, and videos) and from materials deriving from popular culture (e.g., biographies, sitcoms, cartoons, and films); and finally, scholarly materials, such as research on students, activism, identity, race, and so forth. Analyzing myriad data sources allowed me to conceptualize a culture of activism as I understood it in my study. Next, I will discuss the data sources in detail.

Interviews

There are numerous approaches to interviewing in qualitative research. In my study I distinguish between formal and informal interviews/conversations. Formal refers to the interviews I conducted with my research participants. Interviews or conversations that I had with other individuals are considered informal interviews in my study. I conducted my first formal interview on March 27, 2019, after receiving IRB (IRB-19-0106) confirmation on March 21, 2019, and before defending my dissertation proposal on April 25, 2019. Between March and October 2019, I conducted two sets of formal interviews, a total of seven formal, semi-structured interviews with each participant.

Semi-structured interviews consist of preparing a limited number of questions in advance while also planning to ask follow-up questions.[20] These questions are outlined in Appendix A and B. To start learning key issues pertaining to my study I conducted one, one-hour interview at the beginning of the study (four interviews total with four participants). Prior to the interviews I picked a feasible and practical place for both the participants and myself.[21] Because of my familiarity with Duende and Ally we held the first interview at my apartment. I was less familiar with Marwa, therefore, we conducted the first interview at the FIU library. Unlike the other participants, Bonny lives in Hollywood, Florida, almost one hour away from FIU. For their convenience, I drove to their apartment. The first four interviews were held on March 27, 2019 (Ally); March 28, 2019 (Bonny); April 4, 2019 (Duende); and April 5, 2019 (Marwa).

In addition to these four interviews, I also conducted three more semi-structured formal interviews in October 2019 as I was preparing for a conference at the American Educational Studies Association (AESA). I began to transcribe the semi-structured interviews in September 2019 when I formally ended data collection. As I was transcribing the data I noticed that fear was becoming a theme among the participants who had immigrant experiences. As a follow-up, I set up three more interviews with Duende, Marwa, and Ally. At this point, I was conceptualizing immigrants and immigration in the legal sense. After the interviews, I began to think about immigrantness as a concept which reflects feelings of outsiderness. Had I thought about immigrantness in this manner prior to these interviews, I would have also included Bonny in the interviews. Feeling that one has to hide part of their identity, such as a queer identity, can also be a type of immigrantness.

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[20] Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012), 31.
[21] Ibid., 53-54.

Two of these interviews (Marwa and Duende) were held on FIU's campus, in an office located in the education building. Ally was interviewed at his home. These three interviews were held on October 2, 2019 (Duende); October 7, 2019 (Marwa); and October 9, 2019 (Ally). In dealing with my dissertation revisions, I also called Ally for one final interview on March 25, 2021. The purpose of this interview was to seek clarification regarding an altercation we spoke about during our first formal interview on March 27, 2019.

Conversations

Whereas semi-structured interviews are scheduled, extended conversations between researcher and participant, there are also other forms of interviews. Casual conversations, for example, became a vital component of my study. Casual conversations are "brief, completely unstructured and open-ended, spur-of-the-moment chats…[where] the social nature of the situation, its public character, and informality, makes it inappropriate to pose complicated questions."[22] Throughout my study I attended numerous events with the participants. During these events I would often have questions for the participants. These were not questions I had before the event, rather, these questions came to mind at the moment.

For example, on Sunday, August 10, 2019, I was at my apartment practicing guitar. While I was practicing, Duende text me to see if I wanted to hang out with him, his boyfriend, and Bonny in Hollywood, Florida; I agreed. This was not a scheduled meeting, it was spontaneous. Upon arrival, we began to talk about politics, activism, and identity. I arrived at 9:00 pm and the conversation lasted over two hours. On another occasion, November 14, 2019, Duende called me at 1:30 am for advice. Duende asked how I would feel about working alongside a political organizer who was a rapist. This conversation lasted less than fifteen minutes. Both of these conversations, one face-to-face, and the other over the phone, are examples of what I consider to be casual conversations.

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[22] Ibid., 31.

In addition to formal semi-structured interviews and casual conversations, I also engaged in informal interviews/conversations with others. Because this study is a cultural argument about activism, I also conversed with others, not just my research participants. Informal interviews refer to the conversations I had with non-research participants. Some of these conversations were with professors, friends, roommates, classmates, or other individuals who influenced my thoughts on activism. For example, I presented two research papers at AESA between November 1-2, 2019. These papers addressed issues pertaining to my dissertation research. People who heard my presentation asked questions about my thoughts regarding activism. These conversations, in conjunction with the notes I took also influenced my conceptualizations regarding a culture of activism. As I stated before, I collected data for ten months, until October 2019. However, I have had numerous casual conversations with many people about my topic since that date. Each of these conversations, consciously, and perhaps even subconsciously, have influenced my study in some capacity. As such, casual conversations that were relevant to my research became a vital source of data in my study.

Text Messages/Direct Messages (DMs)

The aforementioned interviews/conversations were held either face-to-face or over the phone. Other conversations were also had, not through e-mail, but through text messages and DMs. Because of my familiarity with the research participants, messaging was a standard form of communication among us. At times, messages were utilized to schedule meetings, events, or just to chat. For example, on November 12, 2019, at 11:39 am, I began texting Duende and Ally in a group chat. The purpose of my text was to inquire about having lunch. The conversation, however, became about the importance of social media posting/awareness in relation to indigenous issues. A conversation like this helped inform my study of how identity might be understood in relation to political activism. Therefore, messages became another source of data that contributed to my ideas regarding a culture of activism.

Observations/Participant Observations

Observations are an integral component of ethnographic research. Observations can refer to the act of recording what is seen or heard at the respective research site for later analysis.[23] Creswell distinguishes between various approaches to participant observations. Two of his approaches seem most applicable to my study: complete participant and participant as observer. Complete participant describes a position where the researcher is fully engaged with the individuals they are observing. Participant as observer is where the researcher's role as a participant at the particular site is more significant than their researcher role. While this position might help the researcher gain insightful data, as Creswell states, it may also prove more difficult to record data.[24] This is why taking notes afterward is vital in such a situation.

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[23] Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, 26.

Participant observations do not only entail watching and recording what people do, listen, and say, it can also involve other means of gathering data such as interviews or artifacts. There are times when methods are so intertwined with one another that researchers have a difficult time distinguishing between where the interview "leaves off and the participant observations begins."[25] In total, I attended over 20 events and over 40 places with my participants. By events, I mean organized occurrences. Attending a Dream Defenders meeting is an example of an event.

An example of a place could be a car, building on campus, or a restaurant. These outings were not organized events, but rather, areas that were visited. When I attended events with my participants I fluctuated between complete participant and participant as observer. As I mentioned before, casual conversations were an important aspect of data collection when attending events. Not only did I focus on participant behaviors but I also made sure to document the way others affected the participants.

For example, on May 11, 2019, I attended a Dream Defenders event with Marwa at the Miramar Library in Miami, Florida, from 4:00 pm-6:30 pm. Before the meeting Marwa and I spoke about electoral politics. She also mentioned that she was studying for the MCAT (Medical College Admission Test). After our conversation we walked over to the small room where the meeting was to be held. I walked into the cramped room and the first thing I noticed was that it was mostly comprised of what appeared to be women who were wearing hijabs. Racially, everyone in the room appeared to be Black except for me. Interestingly, I was understanding race and sex as observable traits, as something that *I saw*. The fact that I noticed these characteristics as important social markers already revealed something about the cultures and society in which I am a part. Geertz reminds us that "data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions."[26] In this way, we see how my understanding of the world played a role in the creation of the cultural portrait of activism in my study.

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[24] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 166-167.
[25] LeCompte & Preissle, *Ethnography and Qualitative Design*, 196-197.

At the outset of the meeting, I informed the group that I was doing research and asked if it would be possible to record the meeting. After gaining permission, I began to record on my laptop. The meeting was a group conversation. In my notes I wrote that it was comprised of "3 men (including myself) and 6 Muslim women." They went around in a circle, left to right, and took turns reading from the Dream Defenders pamphlet. Initially, I intended to take the role of a nonparticipant observer. In this role, the researcher is an outsider of the group who watches, records data, and takes notes.[27] However, the group leader, a young, Black man, asked me to join their conversation regarding police brutality. In doing so, my researcher role changed to a complete participant/participant as observer. After the meeting I had a few follow up questions for Marwa. We walked outside and spoke for over twenty minutes. This brief example allows us to see a glimpse of the various roles researchers maneuver during ethnographic work.

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[26] Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 9.
[27] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 167.

This example also illuminates the importance of field notes, audio recording, and researcher reflections. Field notes are written accounts, either made in the moment of observations or soon after the occurrence. The purpose of these notes is to describe the interactions and behaviors of the researcher and participants.[28] Notes can contain paraphrasing, summaries of conversations, observations, and my own reflections.[29] For my study, I bought a green notebook to write my notes. In addition to written notes, transcriptions can be considered another form of note-taking. Transcriptions require the researcher to record as much as possible, exactly as it is. A helpful tool for this is to use a recording device. In my study I utilized my cellphone and laptop to record interviews and casual conversations. When conversations were not audio-recorded, I used inscriptions or "quick jottings of keywords"[30] as a way to remember something that was said. In addition to note-taking and transcriptions, field notes can also entail the collection of documents.

For example, I was able to obtain the Dream Defenders pamphlet that both Marwa and Ally utilized in meetings. When I was unable to attend an event, the participants sent me videos of them speaking at an event. On some occasions, I also took videos and Instagram stories of what was happening at the respective event. One time, I video recorded Ally and Duende on May 9, 2019, at an open-mic event where they recited personal, political poetry. These types of notes contributed as data sources in my study.

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[28] LeCompte & Preissle, *Ethnography and Qualitative Design*, 224.
[29] Bogdan and Biklen, *Qualitative Research*, 118.
[30] Ibid., 224.

Autoethnographic Notes/Journaling

Creswell adds that observing my own behavior as a researcher is an important aspect of field observations.[31] Ortlipp highlights the importance of journals because they help make “experiences, opinions, thoughts, and feelings visible” to the researcher during the study.[32] Some researchers refer to this as “think pieces,” others call it “memos.”[33] Similarly, Bogdan and Biklen recommend that researchers include their thoughts and reactions to the field.[34] To be clear, journaling is not necessarily “data;” journaling is a trail of analysis. Sure, there are times when data can be found in the journaling, but not always.

I journaled how I perceived my presence to impact and affect the study during both the interviews and fieldwork. I also wrote about my feelings regarding research, the ways my mood and emotions were affected during my study. In addition to journaling in an actual journal, I also wrote numerous ideas, reflections, emotions, and observations in the “notes” section of my phone. In the notes section, I have a folder called “Research Notes” with 62 entries that began on April 25, 2019.

Social Media

Artifacts can vary from formal to informal documents, such as official documents, personal artifacts, or materials of popular culture.[35] Being that I am very active on social media, this opened up a space to be creative. As such, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and

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[31] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 166.
[32] Michelle Ortlipp, “Keeping and Using Reflective Journals in the Qualitative Research Process,” *The Qualitative Report* 13, no. 4 (2008): 695-705, 704.
[33] Bogdan and Biklen, *Qualitative Research*, 119.
[34] Ibid., 85.
[35] Bogdan and Biklen, *Qualitative Research*, 131.

YouTube posts were integral sources of data in my study. Social media data were collected from January 2019 to October 2019. A total of 54 posts were collected from Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. YouTube data sources include three WokeWednesdays episodes, one VICE episode (VICE is a YouTube channel), one episode of All The Smoke (podcast show), and various academic lectures and speeches by Cornel West, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., James Baldwin, Dr. Eddie Glaude, and Malcolm X. Both the VICE and WokeWednesdays episodes were video/audio recorded and transcribed. As it pertains to Instagram, I took screenshots of IG posts that were shared by the participants. Such posts entailed pictures, writings, and memes.

Because my study is concerned with a culture of activism, I understand social media posts as potential attempts to activate. I make this point more clearly in the following chapter by exploring a popular podcast: All The Smoke. Thus, for my purposes, activism through social media also reflects one of the ways activism is practiced in our current times. To further elaborate on this point, I refer to WokeWednesdays in the penultimate chapter. As I mentioned before, WokeWednesdays is an Instagram page where I attempt to engage in social media activism.

Interestingly, I did not collect many printed materials, most of the artifacts were published and shared through social media, which also includes newspaper sources. However, I did collect four printed documents. The first document was a booklet printed by Dream Defenders. The second was literature printed by the Lakota Tribe, which was disseminated at an indigenous event held at FIU where three of the participants attended. The third document outlined a series of chants promoting the freedom of Palestine. The final document was a poem written by Ally.

Popular culture

Two films (Malcolm X and Crash), one cartoon (Dragon Ball Z) and one show (Sherlock) were also data in my study. Such cultural artifacts play an important role in shaping cultural attitudes. According to Patricia Williams, visual "symbolism has begun to rival spoken or printed words as the medium by which our sense of cultural tradition is to be carried forward."[36] Due to the impact of visual symbolism, I consider social media, movies, and television shows to also be crucial data sources. Not only are art forms such as these reflective of our society writ large, but art also has the capacity to activate. While these sources of data have been critiqued, particularly as it relates to its authenticity in the case of the Malcolm X film, this is not the point of my analysis. Instead, my analysis utilized these sources of data to illustrate broader points regarding activation. In this study I explored movies and television shows to explore the spectrum of both activism and activation.

Scholarly Sources

Elizabeth A. St. Pierre and Alecia Y. Jackson have questioned why certain words are considered primary data over others. They argue that all too often, words in interview transcripts and field notes are deemed as data, while scholarly data are consigned to the literature review of a study.[37] In this study, while I did not code scholarly data, I do consider it a source of data. Particularly because in the summer of 2019, I took an independent study with my professor where we read eight books regarding Michel

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[36] Patricia Williams, *Seeing a Color-Blind Future: The Paradox of Race*, (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997), 28.

[37] Elizabeth A. St. Pierre and Alecia Y. Jackson, "Qualitative Data Analysis After Coding," *Qualitative Inquiry* 20, no. 6 (2014), 715-719, 716.

Foucault and his ideas. With my professor's permission, each class was audio recorded (eight recordings total). We finished reading for this course in Fall 2019. In Spring 2020, I was also allowed to take a course regarding race, class, and gender. We read ten books in this class. The combination of these two courses (18 books) and eight recordings contributed to my ideas regarding activism in relation to identity, which is why I consider scholarly materials data.

Data Analysis

To organize the data, I first began by transcribing the recorded data. Transcription of audio recorded data began once I finished the formal data collection process in October 2019. In September 2019, I asked former classmates about helpful software for data transcription and analysis. My classmates recommended Otter and nVivo. Otter is a free online transcription service. nVivo is not free but inexpensive through the university. This software allows researchers to "annotate the text, code the text, search for keywords, and organize the text."[38] In Otter, I uploaded each audio/video recording from interviews and conversations that I had accumulated throughout the data collection process.

Because data were at times collected in loud places, recordings were not always clear. Additionally, Otter had a difficult time transcribing recordings where participants spoke in slang, in Spanish, or had accents in English. To ensure the integrity and accuracy of the data, I went line for line in each transcription to edit, adjust, and fix any mistakes made by Otter. To do this, I put in headphones, played each second of the recording, and edited each line. This was a meticulous process where on average, every ten minutes of recording took one hour to edit and fix. During this process, I also edited the transcripts for clarity (e.g., traditional fillers). Despite being an arduous task, this process allowed for a certain intimacy and refamiliarization with the data. It allowed me to hear and read the recordings/conversations numerous times as I transcribed. This was a vital step, seeing as my study utilized extensive quotes to create resonance with the reader.[39] Once I finished transcriptions, I organized the data by the month when it was collected: April, May, June, July, August.

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[38] Jennifer Rowley, "Conducting Research Interviews," *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal* 6, no. 3 (2012): 260-271, 268.

Once everything had been transcribed, I uploaded the transcriptions to nVivo. To distinguish between forms of data gathered, I added folders as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen.[40] Interviews and casual conversations, or rather, the data that was audio recorded, were put into one folder. Once the data was in this folder, I separated the data by month, as I did in Otter. Text messages and DMs were put into another folder. Field notes that I wrote down in my journal were scanned and uploaded into their own folder in nVivo. Autoethnographic notes that were written in the "notes" section of my phone are synced with the notes application on my computer, and thus automatically uploaded and organized by date.

Despite recording the meetings with my professors, I did not transcribe this data. These recordings were kept on my phone and computer and would often play them repeatedly. On my computer, they were saved in a folder called "Professor Lectures." I also uploaded social media posts from participants into nVivo. In this folder I made subfolders to distinguish the posts by each participant. In the notes section of my phone, I also made a folder for YouTube links that informed my ideas on activism.

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[39] Anderson-Levitt, "Ethnography," 289.

[40] Bogdan and Biklen, *Qualitative Research*, 176.

The academic sources of data that inform my study are stored in an application called Mendeley. This application organizes journal articles that are stored on the computer. In Mendeley I have separated the articles into a folder called: Dissertation. Under the dissertation tab, I have subfolders which are called: Social Identity, Emotions, and Governmentality. This application also allows for note-taking and highlighting the articles. Finally, movies and television shows were not saved anywhere per se. However, I did take notes on the movies and shows that I wanted to address. These notes were also saved in the notes application on my phone under Media Notes. Now, I will describe how I arrived at the themes of my study: activism and activation, emotions, and identity through emotions.

Coding

Once the data were organized, I began to code in January 2020. Coding refers to marking on a "copy of the transcript a word or phrase that represents what you think a given passage means."[41] Coding can happen at many levels. Bogdan and Biklen bring attention to major codes and subcodes. Major codes or themes are broad and encompass a wide range of "activities, attitudes, and behaviors."[42] Subcodes are smaller, more precise categories that emanate from the major codes. I began the coding process by "scanning." Scanning is a procedure where the researcher rereads the organized data, writing down notes and observations.[43] Guided by my initial research questions, I made notes of possible themes and codes as I read through the transcripts.

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[41] Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, 192.
[42] Bogdan and Biklen, *Qualitative Research*, 177.

I completed the scanning process with a total of 172 codes. My next task was to remove codes that did not relate to my study. First, I removed the "fluff." Fluff refers to areas that I accidentally coded more than once. Next, I noticed that many of my initial codes and themes were an extension of ideas I thought were interesting. For example, I created a code called, academia. Various research participants expressed their distrust of academia, Ally even said, "I hate academia." While this code seemed interesting to me, it did not necessarily relate to my study. Another interesting code for me was war. Every research participant in the study, including myself, has a history of experiencing war in some capacity. For instance, Duende mentioned that his grandparents were part of an indigenous communist party in Colombia who fought against the Colombian government. I thought this was also interesting, but once again, it did not relate to my study. Such codes that did not directly relate to my study were put into another folder for future analysis.

Themes: Activism and Activations, Emotions, and Identity Through Emotions

The first broad theme I created in the scanning process was emotions. Under this theme of emotions, I had 21 codes. Under this theme, I had numerous initial concepts that I classified as emotions: fear, anger, pain, trauma, violence, rage, love, crying, depression, exhaustion, and so forth. My initial coding of emotion was not very sophisticated. I began by thinking that crying was indicative of sadness. But such a conclusion was surface level and uncritical. Upon realizing the role of emotions in my study I began to read scholarly material on emotions, which provided a more nuanced framework. Reading material on emotions allowed me to learn the way different emotions relate to each other, which in turn, helped me narrow down my codes. In fact, my first academic engagement with emotions led me to present on the role of fear in relation to activism at the 2019 AESA conference in Baltimore, Maryland.

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[43] LeCompte & Preissle, *Ethnography and Qualitative Design*, 236.

In addition to academic literature, a cartoon show, Dragon Ball Z (DBZ), was also a crucial moment for me as I coded data. On May 31, 2020, at 3:48 pm, I wrote in my journal, “Did DBZ just help me think through a theme for my study?” I address this particular episode in a later chapter, but for now, I want to say that the notion of *activation* came as a result of watching this cartoon. There is a moment where a character from the show says, “remember this pain, and let it activate you.” I began to think of the ways pain, anger, and rage have the capacity to move us or shape our behaviors in particular ways. As I thought of this, I was reminded of Foucault’s concept of governmentality which I addressed in the previous chapter.

After having this epiphany I looked up the etymology of the word activism. An etymological analysis finds that activism is a combination of “active” and “ism.” “Active” comes from the Latin term *actus*, or “to drive, draw out or forth, move” (see Etymology Online Dictionary, 2020). Adding “ism” to the term implies a system, a practice, or a doctrine. Additionally, regarding culture, Raymond Williams argued that a theory of culture is a “study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life.”[44]

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[44] Raymond Williams, “The Analysis of Culture,” in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* 2nd ed. Ed, John Storey (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 48-56, 52.

If we accept Williams' definition, we could argue that a culture of activism reflects a concern with the ways people are drawn out, moved, or in other words, activated (or deactivated) through various practices, engagements, interactions, and of course, relations.

Watching and reflecting on this DBZ episode not only allowed me to hone in on a major theme of this study but it also allowed me to tighten my conceptualization of a culture of activism. After realizing that emotions have the capacity to activate, I went back to the list of codes I had made regarding emotions. After reading through these codes, I decided that four emotions were most prevalent in the data: fear, anger, love, and rage.

Whereas the concept of activation came later, activism, was an initial theme from the beginning of the coding process. Under the theme of activism, I had 25 codes. Such codes included: organizing, environmental activism, marches, rallies, house meetings, poetry, humanize, social media, labor of activism, and so forth. Important to note, I created these codes before learning about the concept of activation. Once I refined my basic conceptualization of activation, I realized that perhaps it was activation that undergirded any and all forms of political activism. Many, if not all the codes I made regarding the activism theme, reflected a concern with a type of movement. Consider, marching, attending rallies, organizing, writing, and performing poetry, hosting a meeting at someone's house. All these activities are movements. I realized that perhaps activation is what creates the movement in movements.

As I continued to analyze the data, I had an obvious, yet important realization, which was inspired by yet another form of media. From the beginning of my study I knew that I did not want to foreclose forms of activism. One of my main concerns with this study has been to broaden the way activism has been conceptualized. Interestingly, I began to re-watch the film, *Malcolm X*, on June 5, 2020, in an attempt to find hope in the wake of George Floyd's murder. As I continued to refine my conceptualization of activation, I began to think about the role of the activator. I began to code for ways activists are also activators, that is, the way they attempt to move individuals to act. But as I watched the film, I realized that yes, the movie was about a political organizer, Malcolm X. However, this was still a film. In other words, an actor, or rather, an artist, had to play the role of Malcolm X. Thus, despite the numerous types of activators that exist, I thought that perhaps there are two quintessential activators within a culture of activism: the artist and the organizer.

Up until this point I had two major themes: emotions and activism. The codes that comprised *emotion* are fear, anger, love, and rage. For the theme of activism, I had three codes: activations, the activating artist, and the activating artist. However, as I was writing this analysis, I also took notice of the way the organizer utilizes the notion of empowerment as an attempt to activate. Thus, “empowerment,” became another code I created under the theme of activism. This code was particularly inspired by Barbera Cruikshank’s notion of empowerment and governmentality. Once again, referring back to the Malcolm X film, I also took notice of the activator’s dangerous quality. I address this in detail in the following chapter. Nevertheless, “Dangerous Activators” became the final code for the theme of activism.

Before I continue, I want to point out that after receiving feedback from my dissertation chair I realized two important issues. First, I learned that I had privileged one source of data over the others: the interviews with the research participants. Second, I realized that my study had wandered from my initial research questions. In fact, my research questions were too phenomenologically oriented. Initially, my research questions were: (a) what is activism? (b) how do four student activists make meaning of race, class, gender, and sexuality? (c) how do four student activists translate those meanings in their activism? Wandering from initial research questions is not necessarily uncommon in qualitative research, particularly for novice researchers. However, even if the research questions are amended, they must not be lost entirely, as they were what shaped the initial inquiry to begin with.[45]

Upon realizing that I had wandered from the initial questions, I decided to modify my research questions. My research questions are now as follows: (a) what is activism? (b) how do emotions work as activating and deactivating events in activism? (c) and, how do emotions work in the activism associated with addressing injustices relating to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation? Modifying my research questions: (a) opened up a space to be more concise and sequential with my upcoming arguments and (b) allowed me to refine my codes to more intentionally include myriad data sources. The codes that relate to the theme of activism: the activating artist, the activating artist, empowerment, and dangerous activators were already part of my study but were not as refined. It took professor feedback for me to reflect on the way I could more explicitly include the myriad data sources. Reflection and more data analysis led me to refine my codes and include other data sources I already had but was unsure how to incorporate in the initial draft of the dissertation.

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[45] Ibid., 235.

The final theme of my study is identity through emotions. Social identity was a theme in my study from the initial coding process. Under this theme, I had four codes: race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. As I read and became more knowledgeable about the role of emotions, I began to see that emotions can also structure the way identity is conceptualized. In my first interview with Ally on March 27, 2019, he mentioned, “I hate White people.” In fact, one of the initial codes under the *social identity* theme was, “White people.” Ally's sentiment encouraged me to think about emotion as a possible framework to conceptualize notions of identity. This is why in the chapters where I address emotions I also explore the ways emotions can construct understandings of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

Summary

In this chapter I have explored the methodology of this study, ethnography. Ethnography refers to both the way data are collected and reported. I have proposed that through the use of ethnography I will provide a cultural analysis of activism. A culture of activism, as I have stated, reflects a concern with the ways people are drawn out, moved, or in other words, activated (and deactivated) through various practices, engagements, interactions, and of course, relations. Three questions inform my study: (a) what is activism? (b) how do emotions work as activating and deactivating events in activism? (c) and, how do emotions work in the activism associated with addressing injustices relating to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation? By answering these questions, my goal was to make an argument about what comprises a culture of activism.

In addition to justifying the use of ethnography as a viable research method, I also outlined what counts as data in my study. I detailed the way I collected, organized, transcribed, and analyzed the data. Analyzing the data led me to create three overarching themes: activism and activation; emotions of activism; and identity through emotions. Yes, this study draws from myriad data sources. Nevertheless, the research participants provided an important point of departure for my study. As such, I provide brief profiles for each participant in the chapter that follows.

I begin the next chapter by sharing stories of how I met each participant. Because of the focus of my study, sharing stories of how I met each participant might help contextualize other aspects of the study. After sharing my first impressions of the participants, I move to Chapter Five where I lay out a detailed argument regarding a culture of activism, specifically, activations.

CHAPTER FOUR

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Despite sharing information about the research participants in the previous chapter, I would like to provide more detail here. This chapter provides profiles (brief biographical statements) of each participant. Specifically, I report stories of how I met each participant. I will also highlight some moments that may have encouraged the participants to engage in their activism. Not only will these stories elucidate the way the participants understood their own identities as it pertains to their activism, but they will also provide context for the quotes offered in the rest of this dissertation.

Ally

The first participant, Ally, is 24 years old. Ally majored in interdisciplinary studies and graduated in 2020. Ally was born in the United States, and both his parents are from Nicaragua. Ally is also active in Dream Defenders, a non-profit organization that works against mass incarceration and gentrification. Ally's pronouns are also he/him/his. In his day-to-day practices, he is vocal about anti-patriarchy, LGBTQIA rights, and anti-capitalist movements.

I first met Ally in the 2018 spring semester; we took a feminist theory course together. This class was meant for both graduate and undergraduate students, however, I was the only graduate student in the course. Often, Ally would be late to class. I noticed he was tall, with long curly hair, baggy jeans, and had a slight lean when he walked. His appearance stood out to me because most of the class was comprised of women. Ally and I were two of four men in the class; he was vocal in class and often offered insightful ideas.

A common theme in the work of Foucault relates to the ways power works in our society. What Foucault calls, technologies of the self, involves shaping or modifying one's behaviors and attitudes in order to attain happiness or wisdom.[1] We might see Ally's behavior, that is, choosing to take a class on feminism, as an intentional attempt to gain a particular wisdom to inform his activism. Decisions to educate the self in particular ways might comprise a culture of activism. Up to this point, Ally and I had never spoken, just a head nod here and there.

On March 1, 2018, instead of going to class, our feminist theory professor instructed the class to attend an LGBTQ event on campus for a panel discussion. This event was held on the third floor of the student union. Many people attended this event; I was lucky to find an open seat. Many people had to stand on the edges of the room because of high attendance. I sat by myself and noticed my classmates trickling in before the event started. Once the event began, community members began to discuss the progress of LGBTQ policy in the United States. One of the panelists, a White man, an attorney who identified as gay, spoke about passing more legislation to prevent hate crimes. During the question and answer portion, I asked about the potential consequences of putting our trust in the courts and the state. I was concerned about the negative impact of legislation on queer people of color.

Once the discussion ended, I gathered my belongings and left. Ally approached me as I was walking down the steps. Our first interview took place almost one year later on March 27, 2019. During our interview, I asked Ally why he approached me on that day during the 2018 spring semester. Ally remembers telling me:

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[1] Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 16-49, 18.

> I just wanted you to know that I thought you shared something very important. Because when I share, when I speak, I know it can be difficult, it can be a place of uncomfort. So just watching you say something very important for the community, I wanted to let you know I appreciated that.

Initially, I was surprised that he came up to me and spoke. But once we found out we were both of Nicaraguan descent, we started to hang out and talk more.

Foucault argues that there is no one authentic self, in fact, there are numerous ways the self narrates itself.[2] The day we met, Ally narrated himself in a way that allowed me to learn about his ethnic background and social justice interests. In doing so, I was beginning to learn that identifying as Nicaraguan was important to him, but also that having the courage to speak in public about what he called "community," was also something he cared about. Therefore, outward expressions or "public acts" can be characteristics of advocating for community, but also of what entails much of traditional understandings of activism.[3]

When Ally speaks of community, often times he is referring to those he grew up around. Ally grew up in Miami, in a predominantly Haitian neighborhood. In our interview on October 9, 2019, we were at Ally's house. We sat at the dining room table because his uncle was in the living room watching one of the Latinx networks on television. In my notes I wrote, "wow, the television is so loud" (10/9/2019). I did not want to be rude, so I did not mention the loudness of the television to Ally. As we were speaking, Ally mentioned that his neighborhood became more populated with Haitian immigrants after the horrible earthquake in 2010. As a result, the population of Haitian children increased at Ally's school. Therefore, Ally was often the only non-Black person among his friends.

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[2] Ibid., 22.

[3] Julia Mendes and Aurora Chang, "Undocumented and Afraid: Expanding the Definition of Student Activism," in *Student Activism, Politics, and Campus Climate in Higher Education*, eds. Demetri L. Morgan and Charles H.F. Davis III (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 60-76, 60.

As our conversation continued, I asked Ally:

> **Gerson:** Do you believe there is a racialized component to immigration?
>
> **Ally:** Yea, but being in Miami, I think, I got connected with the policing of like Black Haitian immigrants, which was different being in Miami.

Growing up in this neighborhood, Ally was hyper-policed by law enforcement. The first time Ally was arrested he was 11 years old. When he was 14 years old, Ally was arrested again and was sent to the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice for 24 days. In his time there, Ally was beaten by police. And as he told me on July 13, 2019, at a Dream Defenders event, "I think that's always been something that really just affected my life in all its totality."

Throughout my time with Ally, I learned that much of his activist endeavors revolves around race, gentrification, and mass incarceration. Ally is also an advocate of mental health. Ally has told me numerous times that he deals with chronic depression. Therefore, he is a proponent of mental health counseling. And now we might be able to understand better as to why he chooses to do advocate for these particular issues. Little did I know that the individual who I met on March 1, 2018, on the steps of FIU's student union, would come to be the first person who accepted to be a research participant in my dissertation study.

Duende

The second participant, Duende, is 26 years old. Currently, Duende is a chemistry major and will graduate in the 2021 spring semester. Duende was born in the United States. Duende's mother is from Colombia and Duende's father is from Guatemala. Both parents are also from indigenous communities in their respective countries. Duende's parents were incarcerated throughout Duende's childhood. As a result, Duende went to live with their grandmother in Colombia. Duende met their mother when they were 10 years old. Therefore, Duende identifies more with their mother's indigenous community, pueblo Pijao.

At FIU, Duende is a student leader in the FIU Global Indigenous Group (GIG). Much of their activist work addresses immigration and other issues that affect native communities both south and north of the United States border. Duende has also stated that global activism across indigenous groups (African Diaspora, natives of Latin America and the Caribbean, and Palestine) is vital for racial and class liberation. In addition to the work with GIG, Duende is also the social media chair for the Indigenous Peoples Movement Instagram page (@indigenouspeoplesmovement).

Duende does not speak their indigenous language, which is something that frustrates him. However, in addition to English, Duende does speak Spanish. Depending on the context, Duende strategically takes on both the identity of Latino or indigenous person. Duende also understands gender categories as fluid, as such, they identify as he/she/they. As Duende says, "I am indifferent towards that [pronouns]." In this dissertation, I switch between pronouns for Duende, to not only respect how she identifies but also to disrupt narrow notions of what it means to be. As Butler argues, gender norms must also be contested at the level of grammar.[4]

Part of the way Ally attempted to achieve a type of wisdom and happiness was by taking a class on feminism. By taking this course, Ally was gaining insight into gender and sexual orientation, two issues that comprise his activist work. For the activist, there is an intimate connection between caring for the self and caring for others. In the case of Duende, they helped organize the 2019 Indigenous Peoples March where the focus was to gather indigenous groups from around the world.

With Duende, we see that organizing a world-wide event on indigeneity was a way she engages not only in political activism and in a care for the self. Foucault argued that caring for the self requires a "network of obligations."[5] Duende took it upon themselves to gather a group of students from FIU, to find transportation to Washington D.C. for the march, and to personally pay for the lodging.

We arrived in Washington D.C. on January 17, 2019, close to midnight. Despite the exhaustion of an 18-hour drive, Duende was the first one awake the following day and made sure we were ready to leave for the march by 6:15 am. Duende set the morning alarm, nudged people when they were still sleeping, and knocked on the restroom door when people were taking too long. Duende was determined to arrive early for the march. I wrote in my notes on January 18, 2019, "I'm tired and so is Duende. But his passion and commitment trump his exhaustion." Caring for the self might be tiresome, but participating and organizing the event made Duende happy. For the activist, even exhaustion can bring joy; for it is tied to social justice endeavors.

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[4] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), xx.
[5] Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," 27.

Before meeting Duende, it seems they had already heard about me through WokeWednesdays. One day, I made a post concerning the topic of ancestors. Duende saw this post and assumed I was referring to my indigenous ancestry. Duende told me that he asked a friend if I identified as indigenous. The friend said no. Duende's friend was pretty sure that I identified as Nicaraguan or Latino. After conversing with their friend, Duende sent me an Instagram message on November 19, 2018. Duende introduced themselves and asked if I could share a flyer from GIG on WokeWednesdays.

From then on, we started to text back and forth, and I asked if he could be on WokeWednesdays to address issues regarding indigeneity. He gladly accepted the invitation, but before then, we decided to meet at Vicky's Café (a café on FIU's campus) on November 26, 2018. To my surprise, Duende brought a friend with him, Bonny. This was a great meeting; we chatted and got to know each other. Prior to this meeting, I thought of indigenous people as a homogenous entity, as "Native Americans." Quickly I learned that Duende was from a South American indigenous community and Bonny was Seminole, a North American indigenous group.

Interestingly, Duende told me he thought I identified as gay based on my Instagram pictures. Apparently, I came off as a well-dressed person who likes to post fancy pictures of myself on Instagram. He also thought I was gay because I was funny. According to Duende, most straight guys make "penis jokes" and think that's funny. Duende said that "gay humor" is more clever, thus, another reason why he thought I identified as a gay man. For Duende, part of what comprises a male homosexual ontology is being “well-dressed” and also being funny in a “clever” way. The body, as Judith Butler argues, is a materiality that bears cultural meaning.[6] Such cultural meanings informed what Duende conceptualized as being a gay man. Duende was surprised when I told them I identified as a heterosexual man. For Duende, it seems that sexual orientation is purportedly observable through certain essential traits, such as humor and fashionable attire. In this moment I began to realize that identity could be understood through many mediums, even if only for temporarily.

I too was guilty of making assumptions. I thought Duende identified as a straight man based on their mannerisms. Butler argues that gender is performative, which means that is “real only to the extent that is performed.”[7] The mannerisms that I read as heterosexual were a reflection of what I consider to be a core trait of a particular heterosexual gender identity. Ironically, both Duende and I were guilty of reducing identity to essentialist traits. Upon meeting and conversing, our assumptions of identity were contested. Duende told me that within the first few moments, he already *knew* that I identified as a straight man. It seems that this is often how we come to understand gender identity in our society, by what we see or hear. And as Scott reminds us, knowledge is most often gained through vision, which includes gendered knowledge. Seeing, then, is not only privileged, but it is also the “origin of knowing.”[8] Thus, when I met Bonny, I had a “feeling” that they did not identify as a straight man based on what I *saw*.

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[6] Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519-531, 520-521.

[7] Ibid., 527.

[8] Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Difference,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 773-797, 775-776.

Bonny

Bonny is the third participant in my study. Bonny is a student at Broward College. Prior to Broward College, Bonny was enrolled at FIU. There was an incident at FIU regarding Columbus Day/Indigenous People's Day (Bonny does not remember the specifics of the incident) that led Bonny to leave. Currently, Bonny is in their second year at Broward College and they are majoring in urban design.

Bonny was born in Florida. As I mentioned before, they are part of the Seminole Tribe of Florida. Bonny grew up in a single mother household and was raised on the Seminole reservation in Hollywood, Florida. Bonny describes their mother as "always very traditional…she always really valued [Seminole] tradition. And I really grew up with that" [interview on March 28, 2019]. Not only did they (Bonny) grow up on the reservation, but they also attended tribal schools which are more "community and culture" driven according to Bonny.

Bonny learned about the American Indian Movement and Wounded Knee from tribal school and their mother. During our interview on March 28, 2019, Bonny shared that they would often ask themselves, "what would I do if I was there [Wounded Knee] or if I was alive? I feel like I would want to be there, in Wounded Knee, with all these other Native folks, there, present." When the Dakota Access Pipeline protests occurred at Standing Rock, Bonny saw this as a "similar call to action" as Wounded Knee. Soon after, Bonny traveled to Standing Rock to stand in solidarity with the protesters.

I met Bonny on November 26, 2018, the same day as Duende. I tried to cancel our meeting because of last minute complications. My DM conversation with Duende on November 25, 2018, went as follows:

> **Duende:** Alright, let me know if something changes. I got a friend [Bonny] sleeping over to meet you.
>
> **Gerson:** Damn, for real? Ok, let's meet. I'll make it [last minute complications] work bro.
>
> **Duende:** Up to you, no stress. But my friend [Bonny] lives up north so they are sleeping over to check your channel [WokeWednesdays].

Prior to meeting at Vicky's café, Duende asked if they could bring a friend; the friend was Bonny.

When we met at Vicky's café, we had an awkward moment when I tried to shake Bonny's hand. The handshake was in the form of a "dap."[9] During the "dap," the hands of both individuals are put at a slight angle and meet in the air. The hands are positioned in such a way that it brings both people together for a half-way hug. Bonny did not quite know where the hand went or how to do it, but Duende did.

The "dap" led me to assume that Bonny identified as non-heterosexual. But the "dap" is another reason why I did not necessarily think Duende identified as gay. In a conversation we had in the car on December 3, 2019, Duende said in passing that he grew up having many heterosexual, male friends, therefore, he learned about the dap early on in his life. This is not to say that dapping is an innate trait of heterosexual men. But rather, that dapping is a homosocial, performative gesture that often constitutes a male heterosexual identity.[10]

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[9] The dap is a common cultural greeting among young men in the United States. The "dap" also tends to be associated with heterosexual men of color. In this section, I think through the politics of the "dap" in relation to sexual orientation. However, the "dap" can also have a racial component. That is, if one fails to do the "dap" "correctly," they may be called "White." Whether it pertains to race or sexual orientation, the "dap" must be done correctly in order to "fit in."

[10] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 528.

The dap might be understood as a symbol or a representation of heterosexual culture. Failing to execute the cultural gesture correctly marks the individual as an outsider, or in this case, as non-heterosexual. Because Bonny failed to carry out the "dap" "correctly" on the day we met, I immediately understood them to be non-heterosexual. This example helps to expose the fictitious essential traits that are tied to sexual orientation. I agree with Butler, that performing one's gender "incorrectly"[11] introduces a set of punishments but it might also initiate a disruption to essentialist notions of identity.

My assumptions of sexual orientation were also highly informed by my respective experiences. Edward Said suggests that narratives and literature play a fundamental role in the formation of attitudes, references, and experiences; particularly of those deemed as "the other."[12] Throughout my adolescent years, my family could not afford cable television. We relied on basic channels that could be acquired by attaching an antenna to the television. Beginning at 10:00 pm, various sitcoms would air; one show was Will & Grace. From what I remember, I did not knowingly know anyone who identified as gay until I started college. Much of what I learned about gay identity came from watching Will & Grace. As Butler notes, gender identity is "instituted through a stylized repetition of acts."[13] Thus, the way gay characters spoke, acted, and behaved were, I thought, essential traits of a gay identity.

Our experiences are dangerous, because they have the capacity to reproduce given ideological systems as "natural."[14] As such, experience should serve as an entry point to analyze the way "differences" are produced and established as natural in the first place.[15] By the end of our meeting, I learned that Bonny identified as a gay man. A few weeks later, on December 14, 2018, I hosted a WokeWednesdays episode about the experiences of gay men; I invited Bonny to be a guest on the show. I learned that Bonny did not identify as gay or as a man, but instead, two-spirit.

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[11] Ibid., 528.
[12] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1993), xii.
[13] Ibid., 519.
[14] Scott, "Evidence of Experience," 778.

Two-spirit refers to an indigenous person who does not subscribe to Western notions of gender and sexual identity. According to Alex Wilson, two-spirit "affirms the interrelatedness of all aspects of identity, including sexuality, gender, culture, community, and spirituality."[16] Two-spirit also connects the individual to an ancestral past that has been "severed by government policies and actions."[17] This is not to say that Bonny does not use gendered pronouns to refer to other things. For example, on our way back from Washington D.C. on January 21, 2019, I noticed that Bonny would often refer to buildings and cars as "she." If Bonny saw a car they liked, they would say, "she's cute." While Bonny may reject gender binaries for themselves, they seem to assign gender pronouns to inanimate objects.

Also on the way back from Washington D.C., Bonny and I discussed their preferred pronouns. Bonny's pronouns are "they/them." Plural pronouns may be considered transgressive for their ability to disrupt gender binaries and normative understandings of identity. Pronouns may also carry the capacity to inadvertently "recreate hierarchal structures" among individuals who use other pronouns such as "ze" or “hir.”[18] Nevertheless, plural pronouns carry the capacity to activate. Pronouns might spark in someone a desire to question gender binaries and learn more about gender diversity. Or perhaps, it might encourage someone to become involved in activism that pertains to LGBTQIA issues.

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[15] Ibid., 777.

[16] Alex Wilson, "How We Find Ourselves: Identity Development and Two-Spirit People," *Harvard Educational Review* 66, no. 2 (1996): 303-318, 304-305.

[17] Ibid., 305.

Bonny prefers to be called by their name, but “they works too.” Bonny stated that often times, they may use the term “gay” because the constant explanation of two-spiritedness can be exhausting. Unlike Duende and Ally, Bonny is not a political organizer, and yet, they are involved in activating around indigenous issues. Not only has Bonny traveled to Standing Rock to protest, but when the opportunity to travel to Washington D.C arose, Bonny offered their vehicle as a means of transportation. Throughout our trip to D.C., I was intrigued by Bonny's ideas on indigeneity and gender diversity. I thought they would be a wonderful research participant in my study. I asked Bonny if they would be a participant in my study; Bonny agreed.

Marwa

Once I had recruited three participants I still felt that I needed one more person. There is no “correct” amount of people for a qualitative study, but still, I knew I wanted a participant who identified as an activist and a Black woman. On the way back from Washington, D.C., I asked Duende if they knew anyone; they suggested Marwa. Marwa was born in Saudi Arabia and moved to the United States when she was two years-old. Marwa is also the daughter of Sudanese immigrants. Marwa’s parents moved to Saudi

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[18] Hayley McGlashan and Katie Fitzpatrick, “’I use any pronouns, and I’m questioning everything else’: Transgender Youth and the Issue of Gender Pronouns,” *Sex Education* 18, no. 3 (2018): 239-252, 243.

Arabia so her mother could teach. During this time, Marwa’s father moved to Russia to study medicine.

Marwa is 23 years-old and majored in pre-med at FIU. Marwa’s pronouns are she/her/hers. Marwa graduated from FIU in 2019. Currently, Marwa is applying to medical school. In her time at FIU she was involved with the Muslim Student Association (MSA) and with Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). Marwa’s political interests entail religious freedom, gender, racism, immigration, and islamophobia. Marwa also has a fellowship with a non-profit organization that helps with her activist work. The fellowship hosts workshops for activists and provides funding for political action. Marwa was the only participant I did not know before the study. Duende gave me her number and we texted a few times. I informed her about my study and research interests. Before agreeing to be part of my study, we met at Vicky's for coffee on January 9, 2019.

On this windy Wednesday, I arrived early and bought a coffee. I waited outside in the front of the café, at a rather large, green table. I text Marwa that I had arrived and was wearing a Black collar shirt. Marwa text back saying that she was ten minutes away and was wearing a hijab. Marwa did not know who was sitting near me or if anyone around me had on a hijab. And yet, it seems that for Marwa, she believes her hijab makes her recognizable or stand out in some way. I was beginning to learn that perhaps part of the way Marwa narrates her identity is through religion, seeing as the hijab is a religious symbol.

When Marwa arrived, I stood to greet her. Part of Miami culture entails greeting with a hug and a kiss. I was unsure if I should greet her in such a way, so I shook her hand. As I extended my hand, her body jolted back. She clenched her bag, tilted her head to the side, and half-smiled; needless to say, she seemed uncomfortable. She did not shake my hand, and I awkwardly sat back down, also half-smiling. As our conversation progressed, I finally asked why she did not shake my hand.

She said that I did not identify as a woman, therefore, she did not shake my hand. Had I identified as a woman, according to Marwa, she would have shook my hand and perhaps hugged me upon meeting. I never told Marwa that I identified as a man. Once again, Butler's words ring true; the "body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time."[19] For Marwa, like for many of us, certain bodies have been made recognizable and distinguishable as either men or women. This perhaps is what allowed Marwa to assume that I identified as a man prior to us meeting. By meeting me, a person who dresses, sits, talks, and carries myself in a way that is understandable as "man" in our society, Marwa's own notion of what "man" is was once again reconstituted.

As I mentioned before, Marwa has numerous social justice interests. Nevertheless, Marwa seems to focus more on issues pertaining to Blackness and Islamophobia. In fact, Marwa dealt with issues pertaining to Blackness and Islamophobia early on in her life. During her middle school years, Marwa came across Richard Dawkins, a British ethologist. As a child, Marwa watched Dawkins spew Islamophobic and atheist rhetoric on YouTube. This made Marwa angry. Her anger, thus, fueled her activation. During our first formal interview, Marwa told me that she would google, "how to refute atheism." She would also watch debates between Muslim scholars and atheists.

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[19] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 523.

During our interview, Marwa mentioned:

> So I kind of started searching more about, ‘what is Islamophobia? What is this?’ And it led to even more YouTube content on Islamophobia, and racism, and then anti-Black racism in America and like, I always saw America and racism as this synonymous thing…. I just started doing more research on my own…YouTube was my friend, Google was my friend, it wasn't even books. It was just videos…things like the Black Panther Party, and things like Malcolm X, it was just like, this is what I've been looking for my entire life. Like, this makes so much sense. Why is it that a specific group of people [Muslims], a specific religion has this monopoly on violence, when there are like huge empires that exist right now that just kill people in war.

In our first interview, I began to learn that Ricard Dawkins was an activator for Marwa. His rhetoric made her angry. Her anger led her to do research on social media. Early on then, we see the way Marwa was propelled to care for specific issues like racism and Islamophobia. Throughout this dissertation we will see how these issues continue to be a focal point for Marwa. After speaking with Marwa at Vicky’s café, I knew I had found the fourth participant for my study.

Gerson

As for me, I identify as a heterosexual, cisgender man. Typically, I label myself Latino. My father and mother were born in Nicaragua. My father finished high school in the United States. My mother stopped attending school in third grade to sell gum to financially support her family. Like the participants in this study, I also care about issues that relate to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Racism was the first form of oppression I remember experiencing as a child; perhaps this is why I lean more towards issues of race and racism in my activist work.

In her book, *Killers of the Dream*, Lillian Smith, a woman who grew up in the southern part of the United States says the following, “In this South I lived as a child and now live. And it is of it that my story is made."[20] Like Smith, I see myself as a person who's adolescence took place in the south. Yes, I experienced other forms of oppression, but xenophobias and racisms are the most vivid memories for me. Years later, such experiences continue to haunt me, yet, they have also activated me. These experiences have led me to do political work that addresses an amalgam of issues, but most of all, racism. In fact, I have been accosted by followers of WokeWednesdays because it seems that I "focus too much on race and racism." I received a DM (direct message) not too long ago saying, "all you care about is Black stuff, what about your own people?"

I have received numerous messages such as this one. Such messages speak to one of the ways activism is conceptualized. It seems that identifying as Latino means issues that are understood to be "Latinx issues," should be my priority. In other words, I should focus more on "my people" than others. Prior to moving to Miami, my thoughts aligned more with this idea. I often attended marches and protests regarding issues that directly affected Latinx communities in North Carolina. I seemed to have a certain racial/ethnic commitment and fidelity to Latinx issues. When I moved to Miami, in my naivety, I assumed that FIU in particular, a school that is designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution, would be a hub of Latinx activism. I quickly realized that I was naïve and ignorant. I learned that identifying as Latinx can mean many things, to many people.

Not once in my six years at FIU have I attended a march or a protest regarding Latinx issues (immigration, mass incarceration, ICE detention campus, etc.). It may sound like a basic and obvious lesson, but in these six years, I learned that Latinx is a heterogeneous category, one comprised of many racial, religious, and social groups I had never met Latinx people who identified as White until I moved to Miami; I was confused and frustrated. There is anything wrong with identifying as White. Nevertheless, these experiences led me to notice further the many schisms that exist among those who I thought were “my people.”

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[20] Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1949), 27.

This was an activating moment for me, one that led me to take classes on Latin America and the Caribbean. Thus, for me, taking care of myself became linked to taking classes, reading books, speaking with professors, and watching YouTube videos on Latinx heterogeneity. By taking care of the self, I came to know myself. I learned that ethnic and racial identity matter to me, but I also realized that I no longer had a fidelity to Latinx issues like I once had. Perhaps, then, this is why I do not prioritize Latinx issues in my activism. Unlike before where issues plaguing Latinx communities were my priority, now, I try to address injustice writ large.

Summary

In this section I have attempted to describe the participants and our political interests. I also shared stories of how we first met. In doing so, I began to describe some of the ways they might understand, narrate, and construct identity. My intention was not to present the participants or myself as individuals who are static or fixed in time. Yes, this is a “diverse” group of individuals, but I do not want to presuppose any particular meanings. My intention was not to essentialize any of the participants, but rather, to share some of the thoughts and first impressions that I had when we first met. Since my dissertation is concerned with issues of identity, these stories are relevant and insightful.

In the section that follows, I lay out in detail the concept of activation. Activation, I propose, is the main element within a culture of activism. Without activation, there is no activism or organizing. Activation can happen in numerous ways and at different points in time. In the following chapter, I use myriad data sources to explore activations and activators. I suggest that whether for good or evil, activators are dangerous because they carry the capacity to activate.

CHAPTER FIVE

ACTIVATIONS

Much has been said about activism. Traditionally, as I indicated in Chapter Two, activism has been understood as marches, boycotts, and protests. In this chapter, I wish to explore the fundamental component that undergirds activism as a cultural phenomenon: activation. Without activation, I argue, marches, boycotts, and protests—in other words, political movements—cannot exist. Activation is the lubricant that allows movements to move in the first place.

I begin by describing what activation means as it relates to activism. While activation is a fundamental component within of activism, so is deactivation, a concept which I discuss in the subsequent section. Following this section I will introduce what I call: activator. Activators are those who carry the capacity to activate others. While everyone has the capacity to activate, I focus on two quintessential activators: the artist and the organizer. Both of these activators are key figures within a culture of activism. The organizer tends to utilize an empowering approach for the purposes of activation. As such, I reflect on the works of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., President Trump, and my research participant, Marwa, to elucidate this point.

However, their level of influence is part of what makes activators, particularly the artist and the organizer, dangerous. Reflecting on Malcolm X, I discuss the dangerous aspects of activators. Ultimately, individuals are activated by different people and in various ways. By exploring the notion of activation, I hope to highlight integral components that comprise a culture of activism.

Activism as Activating

In this chapter I address numerous aspects that comprise activism. I argue that perhaps the most important aspect of activism is *activation.* The notion of activation is vital to this study and will serve as a foundation for the remaining characteristics that comprise activism. By no means I am suggesting that this study addresses all aspects of activism. Rather, my goal is to outline the activism traits I found while analyzing data. Bonny will be my point of departure as I begin to outline what I mean by “activation.”

Myriad conceptualizations of activism exist. Thus, proposing a definitive definition of activism is a futile task. Instead, I offer a conceptualization of what I mean by activism. As I stated in the previous chapter, an etymological analysis reveals that activism is a combination of “active” and “ism.” “Active” comes from the Latin term *actus*, or “to drive, draw out or forth, move.”[1] Adding “ism” to the term implies a system, a practice, or a doctrine. Additionally, Raymond Williams proposes that a theory of culture refers to the “relationships between elements in a whole way of life.”[2] Based on these conceptualizations of activism and culture, I suggest that a culture of activism reflects a concern with the ways people are drawn out and moved, or in other words, activated through various practices, engagements, interactions, and relations for political purposes.

As such, marches, boycotts, and protests would absolutely comprise a culture of activism. In our first interview on March 28, 2019, Bonny shared that they traveled from South Florida to North Dakota in 2017 to take part in the Dakota Access Pipeline protest.

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[1] Online Etymology Dictionary, *Activism*: https://www.etymonline.com/word/activism#etymonline

[2] Raymond Williams, “The Analysis of Culture,” in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* 2nd ed. Ed, John Storey (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 48-56, 52.

Once they were at Standing Rock, Bonny helped in the kitchen by preparing meals for the protesters. I asked Bonny during our interview:

> **Gerson:** Do you consider that activist work? Being in the kitchen, cooking, cleaning?
>
> **Bonny:** Yea. Like, you know, just giving your labor, time, and energy.
>
> **Gerson:** Because it was for the movement, right?
>
> **Bonny:** Yea.

In addition to protesting at Standing Rock, Bonny also took part in other activities such as cooking and food preparation for other protesters. These activities (e.g., protesting and food preparation) can be characterized as examples of traditional understandings of activism. Without a doubt, participation in protests and food preparation are important aspects of activist movements. The conceptualization of activism that I am proposing should compel us to go beyond traditional understandings of activism.

I would like to wrestle with what makes political movements, “movements,” in the first place. To do so, we must address the activating component of activism. And yet, despite the distinctions between “activism” and “organizing,” I argue that is activations that undergird both concepts (I will unpack this further in later sections of the chapter). Therefore, for the purposes of my study, I find it more appropriate to include organizing as a cultural trait of activism.

It might be helpful, however, to understand the activating capacity of activism as a technology of power. Michel Foucault wrote that power is omnipresent because it is “produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere."[3]

Similar to power, activating is relational. Individuals can be activated through encounters with anything or anyone, in any space, at any time, and through any medium. Although it can, activism does not necessarily have to be done purposefully or intentionally. Activism does not need to have a target or a goal that it needs to accomplish. Activism, at a fundamental level, is about activating, whether intentional or not, implicit or explicit, conscious or subconscious. For example, an activation might happen explicitly, in the case of someone being told to activate (e.g., "let's go protest"). In the case with Bonny, we might say that they were activated in such a way that motivated them to travel from South Florida to North Dakota to protest. According to Bonny, the Lakota Tribe was asking other indigenous people to take part in the movement. This example can be understand as an explicit form of activation.

But activation might also occur more subtly, in the sense of someone observing something they deem as right or wrong. Subtle forms of activation can also be the result of force (e.g., police brutality). In the case of police brutality, someone can be induced to activism, that is, activated, but the act (police brutality) is not an explicit call to activate (e.g., "let's go protest"). Bonny, for example, was observing through social media the atrocities occurring at Standing Rock. Bonny also said during our interview on March 28, 2019 that "something that really drove us [Bonny and their partner] out there was that

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[3] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 93.

Trump had just gotten into the presidency. And in the first/second day, he signed off on both the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Keystone XL pipeline."

In this example, we see the subtleness of activation. Through social media, Bonny noticed something they deemed as wrong (e.g., President Trump signing policy against indigenous people). But as I mentioned before, subtle forms of activation can also occur as a result of force (e.g., the confrontation between indigenous people and police at Standing Rock). In this example with Bonny we see the numerous ways an individual can be activated, or rather, propelled to take part in social justice. Regardless of the form it takes, whether for good or evil, activations induce individuals to engage in some capacity.

However, Walter Lippman argued that certain forms of political engagement are ineffective. Regarding public opinion, Lippman wrote,

> The role of public opinion is determined by the fact that its relation to a problem is external. The opinion affects an opinion but does not itself control the executive act. A public opinion is expressed by a vote, a demonstration of praise or blame, a following or a boycotting. But these manifestations are in themselves nothing. They count only if they influence the course of affairs. They influence it, however, only if they influence an actor in the affair. And it is, I believe, precisely in this secondary, indirect relationship between the public and public affairs that we have the clue to the limits and the possibilities of public opinion.[4]

Lippman argues that voting, demonstrations, protests, and manifestations writ large are *ineffective.* Public opinions and manifestations are only considered "effective" if they *influence* the decision-maker. This logic implies that for opinions and manifestations to be deemed as "effective," there must be a noticeable political change. Failing to notice such a change, would mean that the manifestation was ineffective. Political change, for

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[4] Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 45.

Lippman, and I would assume for many others as well, must be seen and felt. If we cannot sense that political change occurred, our political efforts are considered futile. As such, Lippman's conceptualization of effectiveness is predicated on what he is able to see, feel, or sense.

But what happens if we think of effectiveness in terms of the unknown? Susan Talburt argues that focusing on the notion of "usefulness," forces researchers to "verify a 'real' and thus limits open speculation, the depiction of uncertainty, and the creation of new concepts."[5] Maybe, then, activations also lie in the uncertainty of potential. The desired political change may not necessarily be observable in the immediate, but the potential to activate is always present. Political change happens as a result of activations. As long as there are relations, the potential to activate will always exist. If countless forms of activations are constantly occurring, in ways that are often subconscious, unseen, or unfelt, then perhaps there is hope in that. In this way, the unknown comes to represent potential and possibility. By no means am I am suggesting that activism is an immediate answer to political change, but rather, that activation is about the possibilities that can always happen.

So far, I have begun to outline the notion of activation. Activation is a key component as it relates to activism. Without activation, there is no activism. One must be induced to act in some capacity. While activation is crucial within a culture of activism, so is deactivation.

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[5] Susan Talburt, *Subject to Identity: Knowledge, Sexuality, and Academic Practices in Higher Education* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 2000), 83.

A Deactivated Activator

I have suggested that activation is the fundamental component that undergirds a culture of activism. Within activism, deactivation is another important aspect that must be highlighted. Whereas activation is concerned with the movement of individuals, deactivation refers to the opposite. Deactivation pertains to the ways people are immobilized or restrained, particularly for political purposes. Unlike activation where individuals are enticed or induced to engage in activism, because of its paralyzing quality, deactivation can inhibit activist work. And yet, in the midst of deactivation, one can still carry the capacity to activate. I will continue to explore Bonny's story to highlight some of the ways deactivation might work within activism. To begin, I will first share Bonny's understanding of activism.

On March 28, 2019, I drove to Hollywood, Florida for my first interview with Bonny. When I walked into Bonny's home, I began to observe my surroundings. Being that I am a musician, I quickly noticed a guitar that was placed by the front door of the house. In my notes I wrote, "they have a guitar, I wonder who plays" (3/28/2019). I sat in a chair across from Bonny. Bonny laid on their couch with their small, long-haired dog and covered themselves with a blanket. Once we began the interview I asked Bonny if they identified as an activist. Bonny took a moment, exhaled, looked down, petted their dog, and apprehensively answered:

> **Bonny:** I guess so, I don't know. Being an activist makes it feel like it's something that you pick up, like picking up a sign. But especially when it involves native rights, native lives, or queer lives, it's always felt personal to me, just extending my voice, my time, energy, and effort out to join a group of people. It's always been more personal.

Bonny suggests that activism is not some abstract object that can be picked up like a sign. Activism is also not a hobby or simply a way of identifying. For Bonny, activism is enmeshed and intertwined with their existence; it is personal.

But while activism may be personal for Bonny, Bonny also seems to conceptualize activism in a more traditional manner, as that which requires outward physical actions (e.g., extending their voice, time, energy, and joining a group of people). Such an understanding of activism is not necessarily novel. Julia Mendes and Aurora Chang have noted that activism is often depicted as public acts such as street protests or speeches in large crowds.[6] However, in the case of Bonny, failing to practice activism in such a way brings upon guilt. Bonny went on to say:

> **Bonny:** So I never really felt, that it's [activism] something that I can just pick up, you know. Even now, I'm living my life and I'm on my own, but sometimes I feel guilty about that.
>
> **Gerson:** Why do you feel guilty?
>
> **Bonny:** Just because for a while I really was putting myself out there and doing a lot of things, so I've taken a lot of steps back from that.
>
> **Gerson:** What are some things you did to put yourself out there?
>
> **Bonny:** The biggest thing was Standing Rock.

Failing to put themselves “out there and doing a lot of things” makes Bonny feel guilty. In other words, Bonny feels guilty for not participating, or rather for being inactive regarding what they consider to be activist endeavors.

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[6] Julia Mendes and Aurora Chang, “Undocumented and Afraid: Expanding the Definition of Student Activism,” in *Student Activism, Politics, and Campus Climate in Higher Education*, eds. Demetri L. Morgan and Charles H.F. Davis III (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 60.

In the previous section I pointed out that Donald Trump's presidency and the atrocities occurring at Standing Rock were activators for Bonny that drove them to participate at Standing Rock. But there was also a third activator: Bonny's partner. As we continued our conversation, Bonny continued to lay on their couch and stroke their dog's long Black hair. Bonny mentioned that they were usually with their partner any time they traveled to a place for the purposes of social justice. But it seems that after Bonny and their partner broke up, Bonny engaged less with political work. In other words, Bonny was deactivated. I asked Bonny the following:

> **Gerson:** Let me ask you this. And this might be a personal question. Do you feel like in breaking up with your partner, then you kind of broke up with activism in a way?
>
> **Bonny:** Not really. Well, they were always the more outspoken, more, like, they had a lot more energy. They had a lot more energy than I did. I just didn't have someone who would make me go to certain things. It was more of my responsibility.

At first, Bonny stated that they (Bonny) did not engage less in political work. But then Bonny went on to say that it was their partner that had "a lot more energy" than them.

Once again, Bonny characterizes activism as a public practice (e.g., outspoken) that involves "a lot more energy." And because Bonny no longer had an activator (i.e., their partner) in their life, it became more of their responsibility to engage in social justice work. Bonny's activism was tied to their partner. It seems that their partner was the main activator in their life. Their partner encouraged Bonny to act in particular ways, such as traveling to Standing Rock. Once Bonny and their partner broke up, Bonny experienced a type of deactivation. As Bonny stated, "I just didn't have someone who would make me go to certain things. It was more of my responsibility." And yet, in the midst of deactivation, I believe Bonny was still making attempts to activate.

Before I continue, I want to point out a consequence that comes with having a narrow understanding of activism. According to Bonny, activism entails putting yourself out there. Participating at Standing Rock, according to Bonny, was an example of putting themselves out there. As such, failing to attend protests, or failing to participate in more traditional understandings of activism, can be deemed as a type of deactivation. In other words, by not putting themselves out there, Bonny is understanding themselves as inactive. Consequently, failing to be active in a particular way (e.g., traditional understandings of activism) brings upon guilt. But what if we conceptualized activism in a different manner? What if we did not restrict what activism can be? What if we understood activism in terms of activation? And what if we understood the self as an activator?

On June 20, 2020, Beyonce released the song "Black Parade." On her website Beyonce wrote, "Being Black is your activism. Black excellence is a form of protest."[7] While I do not wish to get into the nuances of her statement, Beyonce seems to suggest that Blackness is political. That is, Blackness carries the capacity to activate or to disrupt. As a result, Blackness itself is a form of protest. I am not suggesting that Bonny identifies racially as Black, but rather, I want to build on Beyonce's argument to suggest that one's existence or one's physicality can also be activism. In other words, the self has the capability to activate. Yes, participating at Standing Rock in the kitchen can be understood as activism, but so can Bonny's existence. In the White supremacist, heteronormative society that we live in, a society which enforces and perpetuates gender binaries and rigid gender presentation, we might consider Bonny's existence as one of activation.

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[7] Beyonce Website, June 20, 2020, https://www.beyonce.com/Black-parade-route/?q=&page=1&category=all

Whether the act is intentional or not, conscious or unconscious, an act that disrupts the pervasive nature of heterosexuality and cis-gender identity can be considered as an attempt to activate. Publicizing the self through social media can also be understood as an attempt to disrupt, or rather, activate. For instance, on September 9, 2019, Bonny posted a selfie on their Instagram page. Bonny was wearing a traditional Seminole necklace and matching earrings. The jewelry was comprised of numerous colors: light blue, Black, yellow, white, and red. In this picture, Bonny's long Black hair was down, their lips were puckered up, their eyes squinted, and their head was tilted slightly to the side. Bonny wrote the following on the picture, "Straight ppl will NEVER understand the queer experience, and we as queer ppl shouldn't expect them to." At the end of these words, Bonny also posted pink heart emojis. At the bottom of the picture, in larger letters, Bonny also wrote "And I OOP."[8]

According to Nikolas Rose, the "biological existence of human beings has become political in novel ways...Politics now addresses the vital processes of human existence" which includes human sexuality.[9] In this way, the practices, processes, and procedures that affect human life, or in this case human sexuality, according to Rose, is what might be considered politics. Following Rose, we might understand Bonny's existence not only as political but also as an embodiment of activation. The use of one's existence to challenge societal norms regarding human sexuality, particularly through a medium of social media, can be characterized as an attempt to activate others, whether Bonny realizes this or not. Posts such as these might challenge someone's understanding of gender identity or sexual orientation. It might cause someone to re-think or reflect about their own biases and prejudices regarding identity. Such posts might even encourage others to post more about the politics of life. Challenging the status quo of what it means to be, however, can also put the individual in danger (e.g., violence, threats, and death).

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[8] On August 10, 2019, I hung out with Bonny, Duende, and Duende's boyfriend at Bonny's apartment in Hollywood, Florida. We all sat at the dining room table and as we were chatting I asked what does "and I oop" mean? I had heard the three of them use the expression before, but I was unaware of its meaning. The three of them looked at each other and laughed. They informed me that the expression is "gay lingo" that can be utilized to emphasize a particular expression. Obviously not every person who identifies as gay utilizes this expression. Rather, those who use the expression "and I oop" tend to identify as gay.

The point here is that while participating in movements such as Standing Rock are important, there are also other ways of being active; it is not always about attending and participating in large scale protests. Even in the midst of feeling deactivated, one's existence can also be utilized for the purposes of activation. As Beyonce suggested, one's existence already carries the capacity to activate and induce people to act in particular ways, whether for good or evil. In the next section I continue to draw from social media and academic literature to further expound on the conceptualization of activation.

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[9] Nikolas Rose, "The Politics of Life Itself," in *The New Social Theory Reader*, 2nd ed., eds. Steven Seidman and Jeffrey C. Alexander (London: Routledge, 2008), 219.

Activation and Activator

The basketball podcast, *All The Smoke*, is hosted by two former NBA players. In each episode they invite an athlete to share their story. In their third episode, Shaun King, a social media activist, was their featured guest. One of the hosts, Matt Barnes, introduced King as “someone who I have just kinda learned so much from, from social media.”[10] Barnes begins by acknowledging how social media has been a medium to learn from Shaun King and social justice. The other host, Stephen Jackson, also lauded King for being someone who he sees as an “educator.”

King began by sharing his personal story, growing up as a biracial adolescent in rural Kentucky. By the time King started high school, he states that it was a “whole other monster.” King said, “the town was super segregated, there was major racial strife in the high school. We were being called the n-word. I had a redneck throw a jar of tobacco spit in my face. We were dealing with full-on bigotry.” As King was sharing his story, the two podcast hosts were sitting on a large, pink, fuzzy couch. They were quiet, faces shrugged, intently listening, with their eyes intensely focused on King. King was also sitting on the couch with them, voice monotone, addressing a story which he has apparently shared numerous times. And yet, as he shared his story, one of racial violence, he looked down, away from the hosts, with his eyes focused on the glass coffee table in the middle of the room.

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[10] All The Smoke Podcast, *Episode 3: Shaun King*, November 7, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dc6jUoUSrw&t=521s

When he started high school, King stated that he was physically brutalized by a group of racist White students. The brutalization was so horrific that he missed two years of high school to recover from injuries. He said:

> That shaped the rest of my life. I hate that that happened. I had three spinal surgeries, fought my way back to recovery, but had that not happened…going through all that, impacted me so deeply that this fight for justice became such a huge part of my life.[11]

King described a terrible, racist, and violent experience. This was a vital moment in his life, one that activated him. King uses the word "impact." Activation, then, might refer to the way something impacts the individual. But impact can also be understood as a type of impression. According to Kyla Schuller, impressions refer to both a "causal action and its effects, particularly a change produced in some passive subject by the operation of an external cause."[12] An aspect of activation relates to the impacts and impressions that are made on subjects, which leads them to act in particular ways.

This example addresses two important issues of activism. First, it highlights the impact of experiences in relation to activation. For King, his hometown was ripe with racial tension, so much, that it led to his brutalization. But had that not happened, according to King, he would not have dedicated his life to social justice work. The traumatic beating that he received in his adolescence, one fueled by bigotry, impacted and thus, activated him to act. Such an activation could have led King to retaliate against those who brutalized him. Instead, this violent experience left an impression on him, one that oriented him to fight for justice. Arguably, the bigots who brutalized King might also be understood as activators. It was their horrific actions that played a key role in activating King. As King stated, this experience shaped the rest of his life.

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Kyla Schuller, *The Biopolitics of Feeling: Race, Sex, and Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 7.

Secondly, this example highlights the activator aspect of activism. On the hand, the activist might be understood as an individual who engages in activities such as marches, sit-ins, or boycotts. But activators are those who activate. John Dewey's work might help elucidate this point. Regarding the democratic state and "the public," Dewey wrote:

> We say in a country like our own that legislators and executives are elected by the public. The phrase might appear to indicate that the Public acts. But, after all, individual men and women exercise the franchise; the public is here a collective name for a multitude of persons each voting as an anonymous unit. As a citizen-voter each one of these persons is, however, an officer of the public. He expresses his will as a representative of the public interest as much so as does a senator or sheriff.[13]

Whether or not we are politicians, according to Dewey, we can all engage in politics. And at the risk of taking a "writerly"[14] approach, I understand this quote as an argument that pushes back on the exclusivity of the category "politician." For Dewey, "politician" is not an exclusive category. While those in formal political roles are politicians, individual citizens are also a type of politician. As Dewey notes, the citizen-voter is an "officer of the public"

Thus, Dewey takes a category that is typically reserved for a few, and instead of restricting it, he opens it up to include those who are not traditionally considered to be politicians. In doing so, Dewey highlights the important role that everyday citizens play in the political process, not just politicians. Political process, for my purposes, does not only refer to only formal governing political entities but also to the other less formal political practices that affect everyday life.

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[13] John Dewey, *The Public & Its Problems*, (Athens, OH: Swallow Press/Ohio University Press, 1927): 75.

[14] Roland Barthes, *SZ*, trans. Richard Miller, (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1974), 4-5. Barthes draws a distinction between what he calls "readerly" and "writerly" approaches to reading. Whereas a readerly approach positions the reader as a "consumer" of the text, a writerly approach understands the reader as a "producer of the text. Therefore, taking a writerly approach encourages the reader to also take part in producing and re-writing the text. Such an approach also assumes that there are numerous ways to make sense of a text.

Building on Dewey, I want to argue that the category of “activist“ should not be reserved for just a few people; everyone is an activist, or differently said, everyone has the capacity to activate, thus they are an activator. Because activation is a relational, social endeavor, everyone is constantly activating someone else, whether they realize it or not. The goal must not be to police who is and/or can be an activist, for this limits and forecloses political possibilities. We all work in ways that activate others. Our opinions, actions, thoughts, ideas, and even our material bodies, have the capacity to cause disruptions or activations, no matter how “small” they may seem. While everyone may have the capacity to activate, there are two types of activators that I will explore: the artist and the organizer. These two activators are vital within a culture of activism.

The Activating Artist

Cornel West often addresses the importance of music in African-American cultures in his work. West has described Motown as the epicenter for African American popular music in the sixties and early seventies. According to West, Motown produced music for Afro-America to “dance—to twist, jerk, boogaloo, philly dog, and skate.”[15] In other words, this music created by musicians, compelled individuals to move in particular ways.

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[15] Cornel West, *Prophetic Fragments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Africa World Press, 1988), 181.

In, *Invisible Man,* Ralph Ellison alludes to notions of activation regarding Louis Armstrong's song, *Black and Blue.* Ellison wrote, "this familiar music had demanded action, the kind of which I was incapable, and yet had I lingered there beneath the surface I might have attempted to act."[16] In this quote, Ellison is describing the way music might incite us to act. Ellison goes as far as to say that the music "demanded" action. In other words, the music created in him a feeling that was encouraging him to move in some capacity.

In one speech, West described jazz and soul music as "soul-stirring," particularly as it related to John Coltrane and Nina Simone.[17] I am not necessarily sure what a "soul" is, but I believe that like Ellison, West was also alluding to *feeling*. In fact, West has described Afro-American music as "seductive."[18] Thus, even in death, like many musicians, Coltrane and Simone carry the capacity to seduce. Music and the musician have the ability to lure and induce someone to move. As such, we might understand the musician as an activator and music, as a method of activation.

Music can be something that alters your current state; it is ethereal. Listening to a song might activate old memories. Listening to a certain genre might remind you of a particular moment in time. Perhaps, part of what makes music powerful is its relational quality. According to Google Dictionary, *relation* refers to the way in "which two or more concepts, objects, or people are connected; a thing's effect on or relevance to another."[19] Based on this definition, we might say that listening to music is a relational activity. Through listening and feeling, the individual is connected to the music. Music can also have an effect on the individual, which is also indicative of its relational quality. Even the composition of music is relational. To create melodies and harmonies, musicians play instruments and notes in relation to each other. Relations constitute music; there is no music without relations. Combinations of sounds (the relations of sounds) or what we call music, has the ability to activate or to lead you to move, feel, and act in various ways.

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[16] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1947), 8-13.
[17] Brown University, *Cornel West, Cogut Institute for the Humanities, Politics in the Humanities Talk at Brown University,* March 22, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2ntOqoCUQk&t=1432s.
[18] West, *Prophetic Fragments*, 177.
[19] Google Dictionary, *Relation Definition*, www.google.com.

To further elaborate on this point, I turn to Tupac Shakur, who was an activator for my research participant, Ally. In our interview on March 28, 2019, Ally and I were at my apartment sitting on opposite sides of the kitchen table. Ally was hungry so I offered him fresh fruit, pineapples, and strawberries. As we both ate, we spoke about activism. In our conversation, Ally mentioned that he admired Tupac for being a “revolutionary.” I followed up on this point:

> **Gerson:** So you said that Pac [Tupac Shakur] was a revolutionary. Because you mentioned earlier, the revolution part of it is the state being on top of you? Do you think that's part of the reason why Pac was a revolutionary?
>
> **Ally:** Yeah, I would say so. That's why he decided to take the form of resistance the way he did. The police were constantly present in his life. In the sense that they were constantly searching for Black panther members that were affiliated with his mother, godparents. That is directly political and the indirect politics of just being Black in a poor neighborhood, in the projects, and having his mother addicted to crack. And I think Pac realized that there's some social dissidence that was 'the thug.' It was a form of resistance, the thug was being rejected by all members of the Black community, like the NAACP, and so on. He adopted that. Pac was not really a street dude, but he wasn't appropriating, he wasn’t that. He just decided to embrace aspects of him that society refused to allow him to exist differently. I really did not realize that at the time, but I realized that later.

In Ally’s analysis of Tupac, he points to the ways someone can take on a political category for the purposes of resistance.

For Ally, Tupac took on the identity of “thug” not because he necessarily engaged in certain behaviors attributed to “thug life,” but rather, as a means to subvert. Because the label of thug is already marginalized within many dimensions of social life, Ally saw the act of *self-identifying* as a site of resistance for Tupac. Identifying as a thug, articulating certain lyrics, and behaving in certain ways, that is, refusing to conform to the status quo, was perhaps Tupac’s way of, to borrow from Foucault, “promoting new forms of subjectivity.”[20] However, this also made Tupac a target of the state, which inevitably led to his incarceration.

Regarding Tupac, Dyson has argued that “Rapping was race war by other means…To be sure, Tupac saw thug life extending Panther beliefs in self-defense and class rebellion.”[21] Yes, engaging in “thug life” led Tupac down a volatile and precarious journey, but it was also a means of resistance, which is what stood out to Ally. Through his artistry and musicianship, Tupac also served as an activator for Ally. For instance, not only was Tupac a rapper, but he was also a poet. Though some argue that rap lyrics are poetry, in this case, I am referring to a more traditional understanding of poetry. In his poem, “How Can We Be Free,” Tupac wrote:

> Sometimes I wonder about this race
> Because we must be blind as hell
> 2 think we live in equality
> while Nelson Mandela rots in a jail cell
> Where the shores of Howard Beach
> are full of Afrikan corpses
> And those that do live 2 be 18
> Bumrush 2 join the Armed Forces
> This so called “Home of the Brave”
> why isn’t anybody Backing us up!

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[20] Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 777-795, 785.

[21] Michael Eric Dyson, *Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2003), 48.

When they c these crooked ass Redneck cops
constantly Jacking us up
Now I bet some punk will say I'm racist
I can tell by the way you smile at me
then I remember George Jackson, Huey Newton
and Geronimo 2 hell with Lady Liberty[22]

In this poem, Tupac points to the numerous manifestations of race and class oppression. Not only is the content of the poem important, but the medium of communication (e.g., poetry) is also important.

Michael Kimmel argues that violence is often the "single most evident marker of manhood."[23] If Kimmel is correct, poetry might be considered antithetical to that which comprises "manhood." And yet, interestingly enough, writing poetry might be another aspect of thug life. According to Ally, thug life for Tupac meant embracing "aspects of him that society refused to allow him to exist differently." Writing poetry, an act that is not considered to be "masculine," is a subversive act in a society where violence is a cornerstone of heterosexual masculinity.

In this same interview on March 28, 2019, Ally and I also spoke about the importance of activist poetry in his own life.

> **Ally:** Well, I'm gonna have a performance, I need to work on my piece. I think writing is very important. I helped write the statement that was released on the Dream Defenders site.
>
> **Gerson:** So to you, writing and poetry, is that part of your activism?
>
> **Ally:** It depends. Poetry, initially, was more personal to me. But I realized that I could write a whole poem; I couldn't write a whole essay, something that wasn't assigned to me.

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[22] Tupac Shakur, *The Rose That Grew From Concrete,* (New York, NY: Pocket Books, 1999), 137.

[23] Michael S. Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity," in *Feminism & Masculinitie*s ed. Peter F. Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 182-199, 189.

> **Gerson:** But can the personal also be political?
>
> **Ally:** Oh, yeah definitely, my existence is political.
>
> **Gerson:** So then your poetry, let's say it gets recited or something.
>
> **Ally:** Yeah, I wrote, I can give you a pamphlet I have in the car. We were handing out, we did a show. And I have a poem on there. It's very political. It's like "someone told me shoot my gun in there once a week, but slow down gentrification. I said fucking bullets, who shot the screen? Because the van want no war." [Ally forgot the words]
>
> **Gerson:** So yea, do you consider that part of your activist work?
>
> **Ally:** That piece? Yes, Definitely. It was directly against the stance and we're working with community justice project and different things to get Little Haiti not to be gentrified, trying to get community members active, organizing to get people to come to an event.
>
> **Gerson:** So here's a weird question. When you were writing that piece, was that, that process of writing it and thinking about it? Was that activism for you? Or was it the fact that you recited it somewhere and now is being used [Cut me off as I was speaking]
>
> **Ally:** Writing it was activism, activism can definitely be revolutionary.

For Ally, both the process of writing the poem and the poem itself, contribute to activist endeavors.

We might consider Ally and Tupac to be activating artists who through their poetry attempted to activate members of the community. Michael Eric Dyson argues that Tupac's "pedagogy of race was equal parts Paulo Freire and John Dewey, based in the belief that morally literate citizens can help transform society."[24] Similarly, Ally held the belief that his own poetry might help residents of Little Haiti become more active in fighting against the gentrification of their community.

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[24] Dyson, *Holler*, 55.

Perhaps activating can have a governmental component. For Cruikshank, subjects are transformed into citizens by what she calls "technologies of citizenship."[25] Such technologies might include discourses, programs, or other tactics. In this case, the use of poetry, directed at making individuals "politically active and capable of self-government."[26] Ally numerous efforts (i.e., poetry) might be deemed as a governmental attempt that was aimed at empowering Little Haiti residents to resist gentrification. Within a culture of activism, then, we see how the musician and the poet carry the capacity to activate through their art. One of the ways Ally was activated was through Tupac's art. In turn, Ally was inspired to also write poetry in hopes of activating the residents of Little Haiti.

The Activating Organizer

There is also another activator that is vital within a culture of activism: the organizer. As I stated in the literature review, there are overlaps between "activism" and "organizing." For some, these terms might be synonyms. For others, these terms are understood differently. In this section I argue that while activism and organizing may be distinct, it is activations that undergird both concepts. I will utilize conversations with Marwa as a point of departure. I will also continue to explore the way empowerment serves as an activating component of organizing. To do so, I reference conversations with Marwa, while also interweaving examples of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and President Donald Trump.

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[25] Barbara Cruikshank, *The Will To Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 1.

[26] Ibid., 1.

As I have already stated, activism is malleable and can take many forms. Activation, the fundamental component of activism, resides in relations between the individual and the milieu around them. Activation is about the attempt at moving people in particular ways. Activation is a concept that conveys an action. My first formal conversation with Marwa was held on April 5, 2019, at the FIU library in a private study room. We sat across from each other; our conversation flowed organically. As our conversation began, I asked Marwa about what activism means to her.

> **Gerson:** So in your own words, what is an activist?
>
> **Marwa:** I consider an activist someone who *consistently engages* with different political movements, who comes up to protest, and is very consistent with it, always *standing up* for people in the right. But also make a distinction between someone who's an activist and an organizer. I consider myself an organizer, and I really want to focus on honing my skills as a community organizer because I think community organizing is one of the most important things we can do. I feel like the activism will always be there.

Marwa began by distinguishing between activist and organizer. Marwa also went on to explain what she believes are key aspects of both activism and organizing. She said:

> **Marwa:** Activism will come from the people all the time, but I feel we really need to do is to *train* people in your community to be organizers, people who can handle it, *mobilizing* different people in your community, despite, you know, intracommunal tensions, people who got *to take* these group of people here to here, people who can really *navigate* and *mobilize* communities, I feel like that is such a more important function to me and as a community. And I think someone who's an organizer, they just kind of *build* more long term commitments to a community. I don't think an activist has to be someone who is deeply committed to a specific community, I feel like you could be an activist for a lot of things like, I could be an activist for like racial justice, economic justice, like all this stuff. I can do here in Florida, or New York, but I feel like to be a community organizer, you really have a very strong revolutionary *love* for your community to be like, 'no, I choose this community, I'm going to stay in this place. And work on *cultivating* my community, *working* on politically educating my community, on mobilizing them, so you can work on that process.' So I guess in my head that's kind of how I defined it for myself [Italics added for emphasis].

For Marwa, there is a distinction between organizing and activism. And yet, both concepts are undergirded by one central theme: movement.

These concepts, as understood by Marwa, demonstrate a concern with the different ways people act for the purposes of political movements. Activism appears to be more fluid, a concept that can be exercised by anyone. For Marwa, the activist "consistently engages" and is "always standing up." Such actions are enacted by individuals, in relation to their respective communities. Unlike activism, Marwa suggests that organizing is a more specific, specialized area of political work.

This work requires the organizer to lead, train, educate, mitigate conflicts, mobilize, and build community. Exercising activities for the purposes of social justice seems to be what undergirds both activism and organizing. In other words, there is no activism or organizing without actions. Engaging in action is a characteristic of activators. The individual may identify as either activist or organizer, but it is activations that lie at the root of their political efforts.

Moreover, Marwa suggests that commitment and love are the activities that most distinguish organizing from activism. Once again, what undergirds this conceptualization of organizing are actions (e.g., commitment and love). As noted by Marwa, jumping from issue to issue may be acceptable for activists; not for organizers. Organizers must remain committed to a specific cause. Commitment, as defined by Google Dictionary,[27] refers to a state of devotion or dedication to a particular activity.

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[27] Google Dictionary, *Commitment Definition*, www.google.com.

For Marwa, loyalty and commitment are the long-term activities that constitute the identity of organizer. Marwa indicates that one must love in order to maintain this loyalty. Actions lie at the core of both organizing and activism. Marwa argues further that because oppression is “organized and strategically deployed,” movements against injustice must also be organized and strategic. Marwa understands that movements are comprised of people. However, there is a governmental aspect to movements, that of empowerment. In order to move, people must first be empowered, that is, activated.

Activation through Empowerment

The concept of governmentality concerns itself with the shaping of human conduct. It is a relational activity that uses a variety of techniques employed by individuals and institutions to shape conduct by working through our desires and interests.[28] An example of this might be the organizer, an individual who utilizes particular rationalities while making constant efforts to shape the behaviors of their community. I will utilize this conceptualization of governmentality to highlight further the activating aspect of organizing. Building on this idea of governmentality, I propose that empowerment is used as a technique to activate people to take part in political movements.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is often extolled for his commitment to the struggle for freedom. Dyson lauds Dr. King for challenging “our nations moral memory,” which is why he considers Dr. King to be the “greatest American ever produced on our native soil."[29] Notably, King is often associated for his contributions to the Civil Rights Movement. The term *movement* refers to some sort of change or development. Thus, if activation is what propels individuals to move in particular ways, we might say that there are no movements without numerous contemporaneous activations. This is not to say that activation will always lead someone to move. But rather, that one cannot move without being activated in some capacity.

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[28] Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999), 10.

Some argue that the purpose of the Civil Rights Movement, according to Michael Omi and Howard Winant, was to push for "Black integration and for the removal of any remaining forms of institutional/legal discrimination."[30] Based on this conceptualization we could argue that this movement was predicated on the idea of activations. To carry out certain activities such as integration and the removal of legal discrimination, individuals, had to be moved in particular ways. That is, in order to accomplish the desired tasks people had to be activated. Perhaps it is activations that constitute movements as "a movement" in the first place. There is no movement without activation. As with many movements, individuals during the Civil Rights Movement had to be moved to organize, moved to boycott, moved to protest, and also moved to sign policy. In order to be moved, they had to be activated first. It is here where we might see the governmental aspect of activation as it relates to organizing.

In his final book, Dr. King outlined what he believed to be necessary for the freedom movement. As an organizer himself, he stated, "Our nettlesome task is to discover how to organize our strength into compelling power so that government cannot elude our demands. We must develop, from strength, a situation in which the government finds it wise and prudent to collaborate with us."[31] Dr. King suggests that an issue exists: the lack of desire on behalf of the government to address the movement's demands. The desire of those in the freedom movement was to dismantle legal discrimination. In order to politically organize, Dr. King attempted to work through these desires. The attempt to work through desires reflects an attempt to activate. Dr. King petitions that "we must develop, from strength." To organize, or to be assembled/moved in some capacity, one must be activated.

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[29] Michael Eric Dyson, *I May Not Get There With You: The True Martin Luther King Jr*., (New York, NY: Touchstone, 2000), 7.
[30] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994), 19.

Dr. King buttresses his point by saying the following:

> None of us can pretend that he knows all the answers. It is enormously difficult for any oppressed people even to arrive at an awareness of their latent strengths. They are not only buffeted by defeats, but they have been schooled assiduously to believe in their lack of capacity. People struggling from the depths of society have not been equipped with knowledge of the science of social change. Only when they break out of the fog of self-denigration can they begin to discover the forms of action that influence events. They can then embark on social experimentation with their own strengths to generate the kind of power that shapes basic decisions.[32]

There is a certain empathy and understanding that is displayed in this quote. Dr. King notes that oppressed people, historically and presently, have endured so much. But Dr. King also describes what he calls "latent strengths." Such strengths allude to the idea that everyone has the capacity to act, which can in turn "influence events." Dr. King argues that people have the capacity to activate, but to do so, they must realize their own capabilities. Dr. King also suggests that part of the reason people why fail to realize their capacities is because they have not been equipped with the proper knowledge. Possibly, then, empowerment is one of the ways people can realize their capacities. As demonstrated through Marwa, Dr. King, and President Trump, education and training programs are mediums that can be utilized to empower and thus, activate.

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[31] Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2010 (based on 1967 edition), 145.

[32] Ibid., 145-146.

For example, Marwa is a member of the Students for Justice of Palestine (SJP), a student organization on FIU's campus. Through this organization, Marwa empowers members to politically organize. Even in the midst of preparing for graduation and applying to medical school, Marwa trained and worked with the upcoming executive board of SJP.

> **Gerson:** So you're on the e-board [executive board] for SJP?
>
> **Marwa:** Right now, because I am graduating, me and two other board members are currently training the current board of SJP. I'm still very active with them. And right now, this summer, I'm going to be doing workshops for them because I think it's important. Because I spot people who I see are interested in activism, in a certain cause, but they may not know how to articulate that, they might not know how to go about it. So it's just like picking out specific people who I know have the passion. And just kind of working with them, working on their political education. So like a lot of people in SJP are Palestinian, right, for obvious reasons, and why they joined SJP, but they might not know things about colonialism. But you know, if you're going to talk about Palestine and colonialism there, but we're in America, you have to talk about colonialism here, you need to talk about the oppression of Black people here, and you need to understand why intersectionality is important, why our movements have to be connected. And a lot of them are like, 'Oh, I don't know how to do that' and it's okay, I'll teach you, I'll help you out.

Training leaders is a vital aspect of community organizing for Marwa. Marwa argues that not anyone can be a leader, necessarily. One must have the passion to lead and learn. If one is going to lead SJP, Marwa believes the leader should be able to address issues happening in both Palestine and the United States. That is, one must have a certain knowledge or awareness to be a community organizer. Marwa went on to say:

> **Marwa:** But it's important whoever you pick, you pick people who have a passion, but also not expect them to be perfect because I wasn't. I literally had to teach myself. I met a mentor who kind of helped me through that process. And there's a lot of things I just didn't understand. And also understanding that potential people can make mistakes, even consistently growing, you can still make mistakes, but you have to pick people because you're not going to be here all the time, I'm going to leave FIU, but I still want this to be a space for resources, for community organizations to come in and talk about what they want to talk about, to have a space for community members to talk about undocumented people, all of this, and we have a space here, so let's just do that.

According to Cruikshank, empowerment is a "power relationship, a relationship of government; it can be used well or badly."[33] On the one hand, colleges and universities encourage students to join student clubs and organizations for the purposes of making friends and/or identifying with particular cultural values.

Dallas Long has argued that student organizations allow students to gain "leadership skills" which could include critical thinking and conflict management.[34] In a neoliberal world, such characteristics become attractive and valuable skills that can be used in the job market. Multicultural organizations are especially important to the university because they serve as a way to improve student retention among students of color.[35] As such, student organizations are predicated on a logic which seeks to empower students. While this may be true, the logic of student organizations is also predicated on a more insidious logic.

For Bruce Johnstone, the machine-like nature of the university inherently precludes student influence. Thus, student organizations work as a type of "token representation" at the university in order to lessen potential threats to the "academic establishment."[36] Student organizations reflect an attempt to manage and mitigate risks for students who are deemed dangerous. Considering Islamophobia in this country, Arab youth might represent not only a social risk to the university but to the country as well. SJP serves as a way to mitigate social risk while simultaneously empowering students. As such, SJP provides Arab students with opportunities to govern and improve themselves for the purposes of assimilation and keeping the university community safe.

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[33] Cruikshank, *Will to Empower*, 86.

[34] Dallas Long, "The Foundations of Student Affairs: A Guide to the Profession" in *Environments for Student Growth and Development: Librarians and Student Affairs in Collaboration*, eds. Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe and Melissa Autumn Wong (Chicago, IL: Association of College & Research, 2012), 1-39, 1.

[35] Ibid., 23.

There is another logic of empowerment occurring in SJP. Marwa enlists the willing participation of students who she believes has the potential to lead. Like Dr. King, Marwa believes that empowerment can influence leaders and communities to effectively organize. Through empowerment, Marwa is attempting to create subjects, or political organizers, who will be able to carry Marwa's vision after she graduates.

This technology of citizenship, according to Cruikshank, does not "cancel out the autonomy and independence of citizens but are modes of governance that work through the capacities of citizens to act on their own."[37] For my analytical purposes, we might understand the citizen as the students in SJP or those involved in political movements. Dr. King and Marwa are not attempting to diminish the efforts of the citizenry. Instead, they prefer to work through the capabilities of the citizenry. Working through the capabilities of individuals might activate them to act for the purposes of the movement.

The Trump administration has also incorporated empowerment strategies into their movement. The Trump administration created the Trump Victory Leadership

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[36] Bruce Johnstone, "The Student and His Power," *The Journal of Higher Education* 40, no. 3 (1969): 206.
[37] Cruikshank, *Will to Empower*, 4.

Initiative (TVLI), a program dedicated to train volunteers and organizers for the 2020 presidential election. In September 2019, Brad Parscale, President Trump's campaign manager, indicated to a group of 60 Trump supporters that “volunteering is how you win.”[38] This type of campaigning was part of a grassroots, community organizing effort to re-elect President Trump.

According to Dr. King, getting individuals to understand their capacities to act[39] (i.e., empowering individuals) is a vital component of community organizing. Understanding this, Parscale and other members of President Trump’s team went to New Mexico to “implore people to sign up to volunteer and get trained.”[40] In order to get Trump supporters to think of their long term interests (e.g., the next presidential term), they had to be recruited and encouraged; to think as if they were helping themselves, rather than forced.[41] Parscale said, “Remember, winning elections is not about what I do on my computer or what we do across the country…it’s what you do in neighborhoods.”[42]

Parscale’s team worked through the interests of Trump supporters to compel them to act. That is, Parscale’s team attempted to activate individuals to move in a particular way (e.g., to join the TVLI). Similar to the logic that Marwa espoused, the Trump administration was also interested in training and organizing individuals to move effectively. The TVLI is a six-week program that teaches new organizers how to do "voter registration, how to use an app to mobilize volunteers, and how to go door-to-door in exercises that simulate Super Saturday."[43] The logic of this initiative is not one of domination, but rather one of empowerment. It is a logic that provides individuals with the knowledge and tools to help themselves, and thus, their society. As Cruikshank argues, self-help is a "political relationship, a technique for solving political problems;"[44] in this case, the battle for the presidency.

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[38] Tessa Berenson, “Why The Trump Campaign Says It’s Betting on Grassroots Organizing in 2020,” *Time Magazine*, August 21, 2019, https://time.com/5672146/donald-trump-2020-campaign-volunteers-obama/.
[39] King, *Where Do We Go From Here*, 146.
[40] Berenson, “Why The Trump Campaign.”
[41] Cruikshank, *Will to Empower*, 85-86. According to Cruikshank, the notion of self-help is an aspect of empowering technologies. Cruikshank states that self-help is a “technique for reforming both society and the individual by indirectly harmonizing their interests.” As such, forcing individuals to help themselves will not have lasting results. Solutions to social ills then must be sought in self-help.
[42] Berenson, “Why The Trump Campaign.”

Benjamin Baez points out that governmentality is a "precarious affair."[45] As such, governmental attempts often fail. [46] Failures can be caused by many challenges, as in the case with TVLI. TVLI was confronted with challenges because having a large number of "organizers and volunteers is messier, harder to control, and requires more trust in people on a local level."[47] According to Dr. King, another reason governmental attempts fail is because people fail to act. As Dr. King highlighted, oppressed people have been "schooled assiduously to believe in their lack of capacity." This is perhaps why the notion of activation is so vital to a culture of activism. When people have incessantly experienced defeat, particularly political defeat, they must be activated and reactivated. This is perhaps why activators such as artists and organizers are invaluable within a culture of activism. And yet, this invaluable quality, the ability to activate, makes activators dangerous.

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[43] Berenson, "Why The Trump Campaign."
[44] Cruikshank, *Will to Empower,* 55.
[45] Benjamin Baez, *Technologies of Government: Politics and Power in the "Information Age"* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing), 7.
[46] Ulrich Brockling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke, "An Introduction," in *Governmentality: Current Issues and Future Challenges,* eds. Ulrich Brockling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 1-33, 19.
[47] Berenson, "Why The Trump Campaign."

Dangerous Activators

The ability to activate, or the capacity to influence, motivate, seduce, and move individuals makes activators dangerous. Dangerousness, according to Thomas Lemke, is a paradoxical concept since it concomitantly designates an:

> abstract possibility and a concrete, psychic capacity: on the one hand, it affirms a certain quality particular to an individual; on the other, it symbolizes uncertainty, since proof of dangerousness can only be provided after the fact.[48]

As I stated, governmental attempts, such as attempts to activate, often fail. The potential success of the activation is always in question, and thus, uncertain. The activator is dangerous because even though the attempt to activate might fail, it might also succeed in some capacity. Whether for good or evil, the capacity or potential to activate is what makes activators dangerous. And because the possibility for activations, like power, is relational, and thus everywhere, everything and everyone is also dangerous.

Of course, some activations and activators are more dangerous than others. Take for example the activator who incites xenophobic violence (e.g., Hitler). Nevertheless, while everyone has the capacity to activate, in this section, I will once again utilize the artist and the organizer to elucidate the notion of danger as it relates to activation. I will depict a famous passage from *Malcolm X*, a biographical film that highlights the life of political organizer, Malcolm X.[49]

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[48] Thomas Lemke, *Foucault's Analysis of Modern Governmentality: A Critique of Political Reason*, trans. Erik Butler, (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2019), 239.

[49] *Malcolm X*, directed by Spike Lee (1992). The purpose of this long narration is to further highlight the dangerousness of activation. Yes this is a long depiction, but this is an ethnographic study, as such, the narrative requires detail.

There is a scene in the film where Malcolm X is eating with a friend. They are interrupted because a fellow member of the Nation of Islam (NOI), Brother Johnson, was brutalized by police. In the subsequent scene, Malcolm X, played by Denzel Washington, go to the police station along with two other members of the NOI. Upon arrival, Malcolm speaks with three police officers and demands to see Brother Johnson. The officers immediately respond, “never heard of him.” With a straight face and a chilling stare, Malcolm asks, “where is he?” After exchanging a few words, one officer, with a smug look, head arched up, and loose tie around his neck says, “you didn't hear the sergeant? Outside!” Malcolm responds, “I suggest you look outside that window.” The sergeant turns to the police officer and pulls the blinds up. They realize there are two long rows of Black men, NOI members, standing outside. As the blinds go up, the NOI members who are standing outside immediately turn their heads up, locking eyesight with the officer who is at the window holding the blinds. The police officer turns back around to Malcolm and asks, “who the hell are they supposed to be?” Without taking his eyes off the police officers and with a slight grin, Malcolm responds, “they're brothers of Brother Johnson.”

Finally, the officers capitulate and inform Malcolm that they indeed do have a “Muslim” in custody. The officers say, “but you can't see him, because you ain't his lawyer.” In concert, the sergeant states, “no lawyer, no see.” Wiping the smirk off his face, and once again locking eyes directly with the officers, Malcolm responds, “Well until I'm satisfied that Brother Johnson is receiving proper medical care, nobody will move.” In the next scene, Malcolm, along with the other two members of the NOI, enter the cell where Brother Johnson is being held. In this small, dark cell, Brother Johnson is laying on a bed so small that even Brother Johnson's small, frail body seems to cover most of the bed. Malcolm tends to Brother Johnson's wounds, to the blood smeared across his face. With a shaky, yet commanding voice, he tells the police officers to get an ambulance, “NOW!”

Brother Johnson is carried to an ambulance. Malcolm is standing outside, verifying that Brother Johnson is safely taken to the ambulance. Once in the ambulance, Malcolm sees the vehicle rush off with loud sirens. At this point, the members of the NOI are still in two rows, standing directly in front of the police station. Malcolm does not take his eyes off the ambulance. Immediately, a police officer stands to the right of Malcolm, a few inches from his face. He states assertively, “alright, break it up, you got what you wanted.” Malcolm, still locked on to the ambulance with a cold, intense stare, says in a relaxed manner, “naa, I’m not satisfied.” Malcolm tells the members of the NOI, “to the hospital.” In this scene, snare drums begin to play as background music, as if depicting some type of military march. Malcolm presses forward with his followers and march to the hospital. Spectators stand and look in awe as the members of the NOI follow Malcolm; all Black men, dressed in suits and trench coats, with fedora hats sitting on top of their heads.

Predominantly Black citizens rush out of restaurants and stores to join the NOI members. The snare drums continue in the background. Quickly, police officers coalesce on the sidewalks. The crowd continues to walk among the NOI members. As the crowd marches, Malcolm stands between them and the police officers, like a platoon leader patrolling his troops. When they arrive at the hospital, the crowd comes to a halt. Initially, it was solely NOI members; now the crowd was comprised of numerous Black members from the community. Despite the large gathering, the same two rows of NOI members continued to stand tall, eyes facing forward, awaiting directions from Malcolm. In other words, there was a division among the Black population: the NOI members and the other Black citizens of the community.

At this point, the crowd is standing in front of the hospital, waving their arms, chanting “we want justice!” A police car pulls in front of them. A more senior officer gets out of the vehicle, lips pulled back, eyebrows pushed forward; he seems puzzled, possibly worried by the intensity of the all Black crowd. The officer walks forward, so does Malcolm; they meet in the middle of the street. Still, Malcolm holds a strong, chilling stare, looking directly at the police officer's countenance. The officer locks eyes with Malcolm and says, “alright, that's enough,” as if downplaying the severity of the situation.

The officer says, “I want these people moved out of here.” Malcolm replies, “the Nation of Islam are disciplined men. They haven’t broken any laws [pauses for a brief moment, Malcolm then says]…yet.” Malcolm creates a distinction, those who are NOI and those who are not. In reference to the angry crowd, the officer replies, “what about them?” Malcolm answers, “that’s your headache, Captain. But if Brother Johnson dies, I pity you.” Malcolm was implying that he could only control those under his leadership (i.e., the NOI members). Thus, Malcolm takes no responsibility over those who are not NOI.

During this exchange, the doctor interrupts the conversation between the captain and Malcolm. The doctor informs them that Brother Johnson will live. The captain responds, “Alright, okay, now let's disperse this mob!” Once again, with a straight face, Malcolm stares directly at the captain. This time, Malcolm is silent; he does not utter a word. After a few seconds, Malcolm slowly begins to smile. Malcolm does an about-face, turning around 180 degrees. His smile disappears, and this time, he locks eyes with the NOI members standing in front of him.

After looking at them for a few seconds, with an open palm, Malcolm raises his right hand. Immediately and perfectly synced, the men of NOI swiveled their bodies and pivoted to their left. Once the men were facing to the left, Malcolm contorted his hand in such a way that resembled a gun; he bent his pinky, ring finger, and middle finger; his pointer finger and thumb remained in the same position. The men were standing still, looking straight ahead, facing to the left, and not moving. Malcolm did not have to say one word, all he had to do was make the hand motion. This direction from Malcolm indicated to the NOI members to march forward, two by two, in an organized, and precise manner. As the scene comes to an end, the captain says out loud, “that’s too much power for one man to have.”

This passage demonstrates how one individual, the organizer as activator, has the capacity to compel others to move. First, when Brother Johnson was carried to the ambulance, Malcolm wanted to verify that he would be taken to the hospital. With the NOI members standing behind him, Malcolm uttered three words, “to the hospital.” The NOI members did not contest his request; they immediately obeyed. They moved their bodies, putting one foot in front of the other, and marched to the hospital. Despite the vociferous nature of the crowd that had assembled, once they arrived at the hospital, the NOI members swiftly organized themselves in two rows. As Malcolm said to the officer, “the Nation of Islam are disciplined men.”

The NOI members were obedient, trained, and moved with precision. Despite the numerous times they were told to disperse by the police officers, these men did not acquiesce to their demands. The NOI members ignored the commands of the state and were obedient to only Malcolm. Malcolm did not even have to speak in order for the men to move. With a simple hand gesture, the men turned and marched away from the hospital. To which the captain replied, “that's too much power for one man to have.” Obviously, then, it seems that the captain thought of Malcolm as dangerous. But what exactly made Malcolm dangerous?

On the one hand, part of what constituted Malcolm as dangerous in this part of the movie was the loyalty and commitment demonstrated to him by the NOI members. Malcolm worked through the loyalty and commitment of the NOI members to get them to move in particular ways. In this part of the film, it was the organizer's capacity to activate NOI members with a simple hand gesture that made Malcolm dangerous.

What makes the organizer dangerous, then, is their ability to influence movement and garner support. In the Netflix documentary, *Who Killed Malcolm X,* historian Peniel Joseph states that in 1952 there were only a few hundred active members in the Nation of Islam. With Malcolm’s participation and leadership, the NOI grew to over “25,000 committed members.”[50] His leadership abilities, concomitant with critiques of capitalism and imperialism, led the FBI and CIA to view organizers such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X (along with their respective followers) as the “most fundamental and formidable threat to the status quo in the history of America.”[51]

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[50] *Who Killed Malcolm X* (Netflix), Episode 2, directed by Rachel Dretzin and Phil Bertelsen (2020).

[51] Cornel West, *Black Prophetic Fire: In Dialogue with Christa Buschendorf*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2014), 125.

West argues that people followed and admired Malcolm for his willingness to "engage in unintimidated speech in public about White supremacy."[52] Interestingly, West goes on to compare Malcolm to jazz. West states:

> Malcolm was music in motion; he was Black music in motion; he was jazz in motion, and of course, jazz has improvisation, swing, and the blues…Malcolm could be improvisational…The way he spoke had a swing to it, had a rhythm to it; it was a call and response with the audience that you get with jazz musicians.

As I stated before, music has the capacity to move people, which is why the musician is a dangerous activator. And like the artist, what makes the organizer (in this case Malcolm) dangerous is their ability to move people in particular ways.

At a deeper level, what also makes activators dangerous is that all forms of government carry the "twin possibilities of domination and freedom."[53] For example, activation can propel someone to activism for a good cause (e.g., racial equality), but it can also propel someone into illiberal behavior. Illiberal rule is coercive and seeks to operate through obedient, rather, than free subjects.[54] Such an approach deems certain individuals as responsible and others as irresponsible. As a result, illiberal rule is imposed upon those who are not deemed capable of governing themselves in a responsible manner. Consequently, the practices and rationalities that accompany illiberal rule divides populations and espouses exclusion.[55] We might notice an example of illiberal behavior in the film I just described.

Malcolm was led to confront the police because Brother Johnson, a member of the NOI, was brutalized by police. That is, Malcolm and the NOI members were activated and propelled to engage in activism for a good cause (e.g., anti-police brutality). However, throughout the scene, we notice the way Black people were divided: those who were NOI and those who were not. As I suggested, illiberal behavior excludes and divides. When confronted by the police officer, Malcolm informed the officer that he could only control the NOI members, not the other Black citizens. In fact, Malcolm refers to the other Black citizens as the captain's "headache."

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[52] Ibid., 112.
[53] Cruikshank, *Will to Empower*, 2.
[54] Dean, *Governmentality*, 131.
[55] Ibid., 132.

In this scene, Malcolm seems to suggest that there are two categories of Black people: those who he controls and those he does not. Inevitably, this contributed to a logic that some Black people are more dangerous than others. This in turn left the non-NOI Black citizens differently susceptible to the police officer's mercy. Therefore, we see how engaging in illiberal behavior can authorize people with authority to do with a population what they see fit. Danger is inherent in all governmental attempts because it carries the possibilities of both emancipation and domination; even in those attempts perceived as benign.

Interestingly, I am describing the activating aspects of someone who has been dead for decades. Once again, this speaks to a unique activating quality of art. Although the artist or organizer may be dead, art, allows them to continue the possibility of activation. Despite his critiques of the Malcolm X film, West notes that the film keeps Malcolm's memory alive. Even when you kill the body, according to West, "the words still linger in the air, and it touches people. People take it and run and do with it what they will…"[56] While Denzel Washington may not be a political organizer, he was the artist who played the role of Malcolm X in the film. His portrayal of Malcolm, that is, his artistry, carries the possibility to induce viewers to act, move, run, study, and politically organize in their own ways. While everyone is an activator in their own way, we see how the artist and the organizer, are differently dangerous in terms of political activation.

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[56] West, *Black Prophetic Fire*, 137.

Summary

My goal in this chapter was to explore various components that comprise a culture of activism. As I stated, activism has been defined and described in numerous ways. Nevertheless, a culture of activism reflects a concern with the various practices involved in order to compel individuals to move for political purposes. Perhaps, then, it is the notion of activation that is the most important of the traits that comprise activism. While activation is a fundamental component within activism, so is deactivation. Deactivation can inhibit student activism and consequently bring upon guilt. And yet, we also saw how Bonny still carried the capacity to activate, even in the midst of their own deactivation.

In the case of Shaun King, we saw how a horrific, violent, and racist experience activated him. Because the individuals who beat King were critical in his activation, we might consider them activators in King’s life. Activator refers to an individual with the capacity to move someone for political purposes. And while everyone is an activator in some form or another (i.e., has the capacity to activate), in this chapter, I proposed that there are two quintessential activators within a culture of activism: the artist and the organizer.

The artist utilizes their talents and gifts, sometimes unknowingly, and sometimes even in death to activate others (e.g., John Coltrane and Nina Simone). Cornel West refers to African American like soul and jazz as “soul-stirring.” Music is a medium that can be utilized to activate individuals because it carries the capacity to move people in various ways. Through the example of the artist, we also see how artistry has the possibility to challenge oppressive structures (e.g., poetry, acting, rapping, etc.). We also saw how Tupac’s music and poetry contributed to Ally’s activation, thus, inducing him to also write and recite poetry for the purposes of social justice.

I also discussed the governmental aspect of empowerment within in activism. Following Cruikshank, “the will to empower,” or differently said, the ability to activate, is neither a “bad nor a good thing.” Nevertheless, empowerment and activations are political because they reflect a concern with compelling individuals to move. As I demonstrated, empowerment was an activating tool utilized my research participant, Marwa, but also by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Trump administration. Marwa, Dr. King, and the Trump administration worked through the interests of their target audiences because they believe individuals carry the capacity to act. Therefore, it is the movement of individuals that make political movements, “movements,” in the first place.

As I argued in this chapter, in order for a movement to exist, individuals must be activated to move. But this is also what makes activators like the organizer and the artist dangerous. Their abilities to influence and compel individuals to move, positions the organizer and artist as dangerous activators. In the case with Malcolm X, his abilities and skills constituted him as a dangerous figure. Manning Marable argued that yes, his distinct speaking abilities helped him attract listeners, but even more “unusual was how he employed his voice to convey his thoughts.” Like the musician, the organizer, in this case, Malcolm X, utilized their skillset to move people for political purposes. This, then, exemplifies how activations and activators, whether it be for good or evil, are dangerous.

There is, however, an emotional component to activation. Perhaps part of the reason why music is able to move people in particular ways is because it has the capacity to affect emotions. Emotions is a key component within activism. In the section that follows, I will highlight the role of emotions in activist work. I argue that emotions have the dual capacity to activate and deactivate individuals.

CHAPTER SIX

FEAR THE ACTIVATOR

In the previous chapter, I provided a detailed analysis of a crucial element of activism, activation. Despite the many forms activism takes, activation is what undergirds a culture of activism. Activation reflects a concern with the ways people are moved for political purposes. Perhaps one of the reasons people are enticed to move is because activation can also work at the level of emotion. As such, emotions will be the focus of this chapter.

Throughout my time with the research participants (other data too), I noticed the impact of emotions in their lives. I learned that emotions can serve as: activators, deactivators, and also as mediums for understanding identity. In this chapter, I will outline my thoughts on emotions. I will also utilize Duende as a point of departure to explore the emotion of fear. I utilize myriad data sources to buttress my analysis of fear. Such sources include: interviews, conversations, participant observations, YouTube, the Netflix series, *Sherlock*, and academic literature.

The subsequent two chapters will focus on three other emotions: anger, love, and rage. While the research participants are the focal points of each chapter, I continue to draw from numerous data sources to supplement each chapter. The upcoming stories highlight some of the ways emotions have shaped the behaviors of my participants; how it has led them to act, subvert, and resist. Emotions not only shape the way we interact with ourselves, but also with the world. Emotions are also one of the ways we make meaning of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, particularly, as it relates to activist work. Before I address Duende, I want to share my understanding of emotions.

Emotions and Governmentality

According to Sara Ahmed, emotions have been historically conceptualized in terms of either cognition or bodily sensations.[1] To inform their arguments, both Ahmed and Robert Solomon draw from William James' work on emotion. For James, according to Solomon, emotion refers to some form of arousal; that which is *felt* in some capacity, a bodily sensation.[2] Or as Ahmed summates, emotion is the "feeling of bodily change."[3] In this way, emotions do not necessarily involve a thought or reflective process; we feel fear "because our heart is racing, our skin is sweating."[4]

Unlike the bodily sensation perspective, a cognitivist framework positions emotions as an approach to the world that involves making assessments and evaluations. Building on the work of Aristotle, Solomon argued that emotions do not just "happen to us;" emotions are activities that we "do."[5] For Solomon, emotions can be strategic or spontaneous, they are tied to some type of action or activity. In other words, emotions carry the capacity to activate. Solomon also proposes that emotions are political in nature. Nevertheless, for myself, as well as other theorists, emotions are a combination of both bodily sensations and forms of cognition.[6]

For my purposes, I am interested in what emotions *do* to the participants. Solomon notes that there can be an "internal politics of emotion" which seeks to shape the way we behave or manipulate ourselves in the world.[7] I am not trying to suggest that emotions are necessarily governmental. Governmentality has a rationality and is purposeful with the intention of achieving certain goals. In the case of self-government, it is similarly purposeful, driven by a need to feel happy and satisfied. Therefore, some emotions can at times be governmental. Solomon argues that political emotions are intended to move people or creatures.[8] Emotions can be considered governmental, then, if they entice someone or oneself for the purposes of altering behavior.

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[1] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 5.
[2] Robert C. Solomon, "The Politics of Emotion," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 22, (1998): 1-20, 1.
[3] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 5.
[4] Ibid., 5.
[5] Solomon, "Politics of Emotion," 5.
[6] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 5.

For example, political operatives entice fear of terrorism (e.g., the color scheme indicating threat levels) in order to get people to do something, such as be on the lookout and report any "suspicious" activity. But emotions can also deactivate. Emotions can halt something; they can even paralyze someone. If this is intended by someone, then those respective emotions would be considered governmental. If they are not intended, then they would not be considered governmental. Whether emotions activate or deactivate, emotions can be understood as having a governmental quality if they seek to alter the way we relate to ourselves and others.

Emotions are also relational, for they are "constituted in relations with other people."[9] Emotions are also constituted in relation to experiences, memories, or objects. For the purposes of my dissertation, I view emotions as potential activators and deactivators; emotions are the nexus between power, activism, and activation. I use emotions to wonder about the ways my participants make sense of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, specifically, as it relates to their activisms. In what follows, I explore the ways my participants succumbed or wrestled with emotions. That is, how emotions moved or halted my participants. However, I do want to make a disclaimer regarding the display and expression of emotions.

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[7] Solomon, "Politics of Emotion," 8.
[8] Ibid., 10.
[9] Solomon, "Politics of Emotion," 4.

A laugh does not necessarily mean someone is happy, and crying is not necessarily an indicator that someone is sad. Someone can laugh if they feel uncomfortable. Someone might even laugh if they are sad. It can be complicated to distinguish between emotions and their expressions. In my analysis I emphasize the importance of context, descriptions, and quotations to help with this issue. The emotions I attempt to describe in this study also run the possibility of being interpreted in different ways. My wish is not to be correct, necessarily. Rather, I want to make a case for the ways emotions orient us to act, particularly, the emotions that were observable to me. These emotions are tied to the ways my participants understand race, class, gender, and sexual orientation; also, to the ways they sought to enact activisms.

So far, I have introduced the concept of emotion. I have proposed that emotions carry the capacity to activate or deactivate individuals. If the intent is to shape behavior through emotions, then those emotions can be considered governmental. I also suggested that emotions can serve as frameworks to conceptualize notions of identity. Next, I will explore the role of fear in Duende's life.

Could it be Fear?

Early in the data collection process I began to notice that perhaps fear had affected Duende's[10] activist endeavors. On April 7, 2019, Duende, Ally, and I were invited to be panelists on the television show and YouTube channel: VICE (this is a public video on YouTube). During the show, the panelists sat in two rows, one behind the other. The back row sat on tall bar stools; the front row sat in chairs, and the host sat across from us. The purpose of the conversation was to address varying political perspectives among Latinx young people. One of the questions the host asked the panel was:

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[10] As a reminder, Duende's pronouns are he/she/they. Therefore, I will use these pronouns interchangeably throughout this chapter.

> There's a report out there that says that it's going to take almost two years to identify the thousands of families that were separated at the border. Who thinks it was immoral to separate families at the border?

The one Mexican-American panelist who self-identified as "conservative" sat to the far left of the front row. With his body leaning forward, he rested one foot on top of the other. His answer was accompanied by the gesticulation of his hands.

The young man replied, "you can't just assume these people are families, you need to validate these things…it's been documented that the coyotes are using children as cover…for protection." The host, sitting in her chair, holding a sheet of paper with questions in one hand and also gesticulating with her other hand, followed up by asking, "just to play devil's advocate, imagine if that was your mother with you, would you feel ok if your mother and you were separated?"

This time, the conservative panelist sat back in his chair and with a more subdued tone responded, "no, I would be sad, absolutely…but just because something is sad…you need to have some way to validate these things." Meanwhile, Duende was looking at the panelist as he was responding. Duende sat behind the panelist, to the right of him. Wearing his (Duende) traditional indigenous garbs, a scarf over his shoulder, and a bag hanging to the right of her (Duende) body, radiating with vibrant colors (red, blue, yellow, green, orange, and Black), Duende was quick to respond. With her own gesticulations, Duende's right hand pressing into her left hand, she responded:

> The people who are talking about this are unaffected by this, the people that this is happening to are Central American indigenous communities. Claudia Gomez was a Maya little girl really who got shot at the border. There are families being separated, these are indigenous children. And this is literally replicating the Indian Removal Act. This is not only displacing indigenous communities from their pueblos, but also, separating them from their families, which is the history of the United States. And this is literally a continuation—

As Duende was responding, he was cut off by another panelist. This panelist was a Colombian young woman, sitting to the far left of Duende in the same row. She kept her eyes locked on Duende as he was speaking. With hand gesticulations of her own, she interrupted Duende. Squinting her eyes, eyebrows pressed down, her facial expression displaying perhaps a sense of bewilderment, she said, "they're choosing to come here." Duende turned his body to the left, smacking his left hand into his right, he assertively responded, "out of force!" With his eyes now locked on the young woman, his long earrings dangling from his ears due to the movement of his body, Duende elevated his voice and said, "I came here. My cousin stayed there [Colombia] and guess what happened, at 18, he died. That is the reality that we're escaping."

In this moment, Duende appeared to be irritated and frustrated. He raised his voice, pressed his hands together, pivoted his body to lock eyes with the young woman, and shared the death of his cousin. Duende argued that Central American immigrant communities, and even his own family, left their respective countries "out of force." Later that day, once the VICE conversation had finished, I wrote in my journal: "I have never heard Duende yell at anyone until today; he seemed frustrated, especially when he was yelling at that Colombian girl. But I think he was also describing a situation that evoked a sense of fear" (Date: April 7, 2019).

My assumption was later confirmed on October 2, 2019, when I met with Duende in an FIU study room to have a conversation regarding immigration.

> **Gerson:** So what comes to mind when you think of immigration or maybe what's, what is your story in relation to immigration?
>
> **Duende:** I think I have the average immigrant story, you know, my family, to pursue, you know, a better life. We came here, it got really dangerous back home [Colombia], I had cousins who were dying. A lot of cousins joining gangs. And it was a war zone type situation.

When Duende says "back home," she is referring to Colombia. A "better life" for Duende entails positioning the United States as a safer environment with perhaps more employment opportunities for his family. However, better does not necessarily mean good, it means less worse.

As Duende states, his family was dying and joining gangs, which he describes as a "war zone" situation. The dangers of Colombia encouraged Duende and his family to escape. As our conversation continued, Duende said:

> So my mom has been like my mother and father figure growing up, and she works so hard. I met my mom when I was 10 years old and I didn't see her a lot growing up, because she had three jobs and that was a little frustrating for me. I had abandonment issues. There was a lot of trauma growing up because I didn't have my parents. But even then, I was able to meet my mom after prison, and I didn't get lost in the system. That was a fear that my mom had. Because again, we [Duende and their brother] at one point had friends taking care of us, like strangers taking care of us. At one point my mom didn't even know where we were at. And so we went to Colombia, is the first time me and my brother started living together and when my mom knew where we were at.

The instability that comes with family separation affected Duende at a young age. Being unaware of the conditions affecting his community did not mean Duende was immune to pain and isolation, what he describes as “abandonment issues.” In fact, the fear associated with abandonment would later come to affect Duende as he contemplated telling his mother about his sexual orientation. Consequently, Duende began to learn about fear from an early age.

Learning Identity Through Fear

For Duende, not only did fear become associated with immigration status and imprisonment, but these concepts also became a framework for learning about identity. In this same conversation on October 2, 2019, Duende shared, with a low tone of voice:

> **Duende:** The reason why my mom doesn't have papers was because my grandma was a maid, and she was cleaning a house for this White family. And that White family dwelled in drugs; they sold drugs. And they evacuated the home without telling my grandma…This was before I was born though. The police got to the home. And all they [police] saw was a dark-skinned woman [Duende’s grandmother] cleaning, she didn't know any English. And so they made her sign papers. She didn't know what she was signing. And she basically said she did a crime that she didn't commit and so she went to prison, and then she got deported. And it was for a crime she never did.
>
> **Gerson:** That's your mom?
>
> **Duende:** My grandma. And because of that, my mom does not papers. And because my mom doesn't have papers, when we were born here, we did get papers. But all this stuff happening, my mom went to prison, got deported, had she had papers she wouldn't have gotten deported. A lot of the shit that happened in my life was because of the justice system, failing my grandma, discriminating against her for something that she didn't do, she was just a maid who didn't know English, trying to support her family, you know. And so my grandma was, you know, she went back home. And once we were born, my mom was like, you know, you guys have papers, like your whole life is going to change all these things.

Duende sat across from me, on the other side of the desk, as we were having this conversation. We had maintained eye contact for much of the conversation, but at this point in the exchange, Duende looked down, slowly swayed back and forth, and gently scrambled his sweaty hands.

I learned that Duende's grandmother was incarcerated and also deported to Colombia upon release. Duende's grandmother was in the United States years before he was born. For Duende, part of learning his family's history entailed learning about race, class, and gender. Whiteness, for example, became tied to wealth, narcotics, collusion, and deceit. It was wealthy White people who employed his grandmother, and it was wealthy White people who deceived his grandmother. Duende was learning about power relations. Whiteness and wealth were that which can evade law enforcement, meanwhile, immigrant-ness, the darkness of skin, poverty, and woman-ness makes one more susceptible and vulnerable to state violence. Duende was understanding how his grandmother's class, gender, and language were weaponized against her.

According to Duende, the combination of the grandmother's racial identity, class status, and gender, were used as a means to justify her arrest. Duende mentioned, "all they [police] saw was a dark-skinned woman [Duende's grandmother] cleaning, she didn't know any English." For Duende, it was the grandmother's immigration status, race, class, and gender identity that made her an easy target, and thus, more susceptible to incarceration and deportation. The grandmother was also coerced to sign paperwork she did not understand. Duende stated, "they [police] made her sign papers. She didn't know what she was signing." It was the actions of wealthy White people (the White home owners who dwelled in drugs) along with the repression of the state that led to the imprisonment and deportation of Duende's family.

For Duende and their family, these consequences inevitably became a reason to be fearful and skeptical of White, particularly wealthy, people. This is not to say that Duende is fearful of every White person he meets. Rather, there is a skepticism that comes along with engaging with White people. For example, on April 4, 2019, Duende had a scheduled meeting with FIU students. The students had a class assignment where they wanted to interview a person who identified as indigenous. Duende invited me to come with them. Duende told me the following, “despite being tired, I want to help these students. It’s important to raise awareness” (Date: April 4, 2019).

Three students arrived to the meeting; the five of us sat at a round table, just outside of the FIU library. It was raining that day so we wanted to stay covered to not get wet. The students asked Duende about the role of Global Indigenous Group (the FIU indigenous student organization). Duende said the following:

> **Duende:** We also focus on Asians who are indigenous to their communities and even White folks who are indigenous to Europe. We have a member, he's Irish, he has a clan, and he's indigenous and also White and I think that's important because when we think of the word indigenous, often we imagine tribal, brown and Black, and things like that, when indigenous people are diverse globally. We’re diverse, you know.

Duende cares about those who are marginalized, in this case, White indigenous people. Duende is not necessarily fearful of everyone who identifies as White. But yet, there is a skepticism that can be associated with Whiteness.

Later in the conversation for example, Duende spoke about White hippies at Standing Rock. Duende said:

> **Duende:** We could talk about Standing Rock. There was a lot of White hippies that showed up and they looove [said sarcastically] native people. And they were there, got to hang out with real Indians [said sarcastically]. And it was cool [said sarcastically]. And then they [White hippies] left. And once the hype left Standing

> Rock, who was there? The Lakota tribe, and what did they do? They picked up after all the non-natives that were there. And they had to pick up all the litter, the garbage that a bunch of people that were not even part of the tribe were dropping. And to this day, people are picking up trash, from non-natives.

In my notes I wrote, “as I'm listening to this, I hear anger, anguish, in the form of venting” (Date: April 4, 2019). As Duende was speaking, he rolled his eyes and smirked in the sarcastic moments. Duende clasped their hands, intermingling their fingers together, evoking a sense of frustration. On the one hand, Duende was angry and frustrated about the littering that took place at Standing Rock by the White hippies. But following anger, was fear and skepticism. Duende stated, “And to this day, people are picking up trash from non-natives [White hippies].” According to Duende, the White hippies littered and also left without cleaning after themselves. Yet, another reason contributing to Duende’s fear and skepticism of White people.

Duende’s grandmother learned to be afraid of wealthy White people and the state. By the time Duende was born, a history of fear had developed in his family, inevitably positioning wealthy Whites and the state as a source of fear. Duende also learned the way dark skin, woman-ness, immigration status, and lack of English can be weaponized against someone in the United States. These examples help elucidate some of the ways identity can be conceptualized through fear and skepticism; they also highlight that conceptualizations of identity are not necessarily static. Because while Duende stands in solidarity with marginalized White people such as those who are indigenous, Duende also has a certain skepticism of White people (e.g., wealthy White people, White hippies at Standing Rock). As such, we learn that emotions like fear are a volatile framework through which we come to understand identity.

The Fear That Activates

So far, I have attempted to illustrate some of the ways identity can be understood through fear. In doing so, I have highlighted the malleability of identity. That while perhaps in certain moments White people do represent something to fear, in other moments, they do not. This is not to say that emotions are good or bad frameworks, but rather, that they are dangerous.

The aforementioned experiences taught Duende and his family about certain aspects of class, race, and gender identity. Despite incarceration and deportation (and the other potential dangers that awaited Duende's family in the United States), Duende's mother still made the efforts to leave Colombia once again. Duende's mother decided to enter the United States illegally to raise her children in what she perceived to be a safer environment. As I highlighted earlier, Duende's mother feared staying in Colombia due to the "war zone" environment that they lived in. Clearly, numerous fears affected Duende throughout his life. In Colombia, the fear was about the war zone environment. And in the United States, the fear was about incarceration and of course, deportation.

Deportation is not an uncommon source of fear among undocumented communities.[11] It is here, however, that we might see more vividly how fear activated Duende to engage in activist work. Whereas earlier in the conversation (on October 2, 2019), Duende was looking down, evading eye contact, now, Duende was looking up. Shoulders relaxed, sitting back in the chair, Duende shared:

> My mom grew up in fear [due to her undocumented status]. We [Duende and his brother] would be trained. Every weekend, we would have like a "how to talk to

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[11] Nicholas De Genova and Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas, *Latino Crossings: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and the Politics of Race and Citizenship* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 5.

> police training," and a "just in case I get deported," training; all these little things that I thought were normal. I generally just assumed everyone went through these things. My mom obviously didn't tell me she was undocumented. At first, I had an idea. And at one point I learned. She only told me because I got to a certain age where I was asking too many questions like: 'Hey, Mom, I need your social;' or 'Hey, Mom, I need you to drive me to this place;' or 'let's go to the hospital,' things like that. My mom was very much like, 'No, we don't do that.' At one point, she told me why…I was kind of ignorant to the situation because I have papers. I saw my mom working, doing shit like everyone else. So to me, I didn't know the gravity of how it was affecting my mother, traumatically. My mom lived in constant fear. We would have to tell her every time when she was driving if there was a police officer, we would say, 'Hey, Ma, careful, there's a cop.' We would always have to be conscious of our surroundings because police officers always have that threat of deporting.

Yes, Duende's mother lived in constant fear of deportation. But we see in this example the way fear also became a tool for survival.

To buttress this point (fear as a tool for survival), I want to highlight a scene from the Netflix series, *Sherlock*. *Sherlock* is a series based on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional tales of detective Sherlock Holmes. In one particular episode, *The Abominable Bride*[12], one detective inspector Lestrade rushes to Sherlock Holmes' home. Lestrade enters the home, breathing heavy, with a cold stare on his face, he quickly glances at the decanter of liquor in Sherlock's living room. While sitting upright in his chair, legs crossed, while lighting a pipe, Sherlock notices Lestrade's glance and says to his colleague, Dr. Watson, "give the inspector what he so clearly *wants*." Lestrade takes the glass of what appears to be whiskey and quickly guzzles down the drink.

Moments later, Sherlock observes that Lestrade is perhaps embarrassed to relate a set of information. Dr. Watson, however, disagrees with Sherlock, and says, "he

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[12] *Sherlock*, Season 3, Episode. 4, The Abominable Bride Minute (Netflix), directed by Douglass Mackinnon (2016).

[Lestrade] didn't want a drink, he needed one. He's not embarrassed, he's afraid.” Lestrade looks down and sucks his teeth slowly, as if hesitant to agree with Dr. Watson. Sherlock asks Lestrade to sit down. As Lestrade is sitting down, he squints his eyes, moves the pillow from the chair, and with a slow stutter says, “I'm not afraid, exactly.” To which Sherlock replies, “fear is wisdom in the face of danger. It is nothing to be ashamed of.” Lestrade goes on to tell Sherlock about a new case that needs solving. Interestingly, then, it was fear that propelled Lestrade to move. It was fear that activated Lestrade to seek the help of Sherlock Holmes. Fear, according to Sherlock, is an emotion that can induce the individual, particularly in the midst of danger, to perhaps seek safety.

Ahmed argues that fear is an unpleasant feeling, one that can either propel or halt the individual. Differently said, fear is an emotion that has the capacity to activate or deactivate. Fear, according to Ahmed, involves an “anticipation of hurt or injury…[thus projecting us] from the present into the future.”[13] Fear, for Duende’s mother, activated her. Fear also sparked in her and her children some ingenuity to survive.

Her fear was wisdom in the face of what she rationalized as dangerous. Concerned with the survival of her family, Duende’s mother also utilized fear as a governmental technique to shape her children’s behavior. Fear served as a productive emotion. Fear, motivated Duende’s mother to hold trainings for her children. Through these trainings, Duende became hyper-conscious of police. This consciousness was used to warn his mother of possible police threats. The threat of police could have been real or imagined. Nevertheless, as Brian Massumi suggests, the “felt reality of threat legitimates preemptive action, once and for all.”[14]

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[13] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 65.

Let us consider activism as a form of preemptive action that can be enticed through an emotion of fear. Foucault’s understanding of morality might be helpful here. Following Foucault, an aspect of morality refers to the “set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals” through the family.[15] The values and rules, or rather, morality, that Duende was learning from his mother were perhaps Duende’s first lessons in political organizing. For example, Duende’s mother scheduled trainings on the weekends. In these trainings, his mother covered topics she rationalized as important: “how to talk to police” training and “just in case I get deported” training.

Duende's mother provided Duende with a set of actions and values; to teach him how to conduct himself in relation to what she understood to be threatening. Inevitably, teaching Duende to take care of himself also taught Duende when and how to take care of his mother. As Duende indicated, he and his brother knew to warn their mother about police when they were driving.

Induced by fear, the actions (e.g., trainings regarding police and deportation) enacted by his mother not only outlined for Duende a set of moral codes but also encouraged a certain mode of being. This is not to say that Duende’s behavior has always reflected the values instilled by his mother. In fact, Foucault suggests that morality also refers to the ways individuals “respect or disregard a set of values.”[16] Nevertheless, the actions enacted by Duende’s mother, which were motivated by fear, ultimately encouraged Duende to engage in activist endeavors. As a child, Duende was expected to sit through the weekend trainings with his mother. But now, as an adult, it was Duende who chose to engage in activist practices.

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[14] Brian Massumi, “The Future Birth of the Affective Fact: The Political Ontology of Threat,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 52-70, 54.

[15] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1990), 25.

On June 24, 2019, FemPower, a local Miami grassroots organization, hosted an event in North Miami called, “Free Our Sisters, Free Ourselves.” The purpose of the event was to address how mass incarceration affects women of color. The event seemed interesting, however, I did not want to go by myself. I asked Duende to attend the event with me; they accepted my invitation. Duende was on FIU's campus studying in the library. Because I live five minutes away from the university, I offered to pick him up. Duende got in the car, as usual, they were wearing Black sweat pants, a purple sweater, and their signature crocs (type of shoe). In my journal I wrote, “I know he's got to be hot in that clothes, it's summertime” (Date: 6/24/2019).

On our way to the event, I asked Duende why he accepted my invitation to attend the event. Duende answered:

> Before I started being an organizer, a lot of the things I talked about was humanizing the felon, the criminal. A lot of times the people that get dehumanized are criminals, they are people that are convicted of crimes, whether they're innocent or not is irrelevant. Once you're accused of a crime, automatic dehumanization. That happens with predominantly Black and brown people. And so, personally, since my parents had been to prison, I grew up with that. So my mom always told me to humanize the criminal because you don't know why they're there. So when I saw this [FemPower Event], I was like, 'Okay, this has to do with prison systems, let me see how I can get involved with this.'…The two things I've always been passionate about have been immigration rights, and the humanization of felons, the people that have been convicted of things.

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[16] Ibid., 25.

Many years have passed since Duende's weekend trainings with his family. Nevertheless, his mother's moral codes, codes that were undergirded by fear, shaped Duende's behavior as a child. This is why Duende continues to be passionate about immigration rights and “humanizing” the criminal. As Duende noted, the reason he is passionate about these issues is because of his personal experiences.

Summary

In this chapter, I explored the activating capabilities of fear. I began by contextualizing what I assumed to be fear. In the VICE panel, I noticed Duende's reaction to insensitive comments regarding immigration. Yes, he elevated his voice which could have been an indicator of anger, but the substance of what he said indicated a sense of fear. As Kathleen Woodward points out, emotions do not exist in a pure form, they often come in clusters.[17] My assumptions were later confirmed as Duende described the fears he felt in connection to family separation, incarceration, and immigration. And because fear was connected to family separation, it also became a medium for understanding identity.

In Duende’s life, family separation came as a result of incarceration and deportation. Duende blames the wealthy, White family for the incarceration and deportation of his family. If only for a moment, fear became an emotion through which Duende came to understand wealthy White people. As I also demonstrated, identity is not static, particularly when viewed through a framework of emotions. On the one hand,

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[17] Kathleen Woodward, *Statistical Panic: Cultural Politics and Poetics of the Emotions*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 53.

Duende finds solidarity with indigenous White people, but at the same time, Duende also shares a certain skepticism about White people (e.g., White hippies at Standing Rock). In addition to Whiteness, Duende also learned about the vulnerability of expulsion regarding poor, dark, immigrant women who do not speak English. Regarding Duende's mother, he did not fear her, but rather, he feared for her. In this way, fear also became an emotion associated with his mother. And because of this, fear became an activator for Duende.

From a young age, Duende was fearful of situations that could lead to family separation (e.g., incarceration and deportation). Fear led his mother to hold trainings with him and his brother. I consider these experiences to be some of Duende's first lessons regarding political organizing. Duende's fear would inevitably lead him to continue doing advocacy work regarding incarceration and immigration. This example with Duende also highlights the way children from marginalized communities are directed towards activism from a young age. Fear can be a productive emotion, but so can anger. I explore this in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ANGER THE ACTIVATOR

In the previous chapter, I proposed that fear is an emotion that shaped the conduct of Duende and his family. Fear also served as a framework to conceptualize notions of identity. In this chapter, I will continue to build on the concept of emotions to explore the way anger might also be an activator or deactivator. I propose that like fear, anger can also serve as a framework to conceptualize notions of identity. The following data sources will inform my analysis: my first formal interview with Ally; the film *Crash,* specifically the interaction between Loretta Devine and Matt Dillon's characters; academic literature; and of course, participant observations. Analyzing these sources of data will allow us to see some of the ways anger shapes behavior and notions of identity. I will begin my analysis of anger not with activation, but rather, deactivation. The following is an exchange I had with Ally during our first interview.

Can Anger Deactivate?

My first formal interview with Ally was held at my apartment on March 27, 2019. This was not Ally's first time at my apartment; he visited before. As usual, he parked his silver sedan in the visitor spot of the apartment complex. I came outside to meet him. When he got out of the car, he pulled up his baggy jeans and tied his long curly hair back. We shook hands, bringing each other in for a one-arm hug as we usually do. In my journal I wrote, "I imagine Ally and I look funny greeting each other. He's really tall and I'm really short" (Date: March 27, 2019). After exchanging greetings, we walked up the stairs to my apartment. Once in the apartment, we sat across from each other at the dining room table. Throughout our interview we spoke about what might constitute activism.

Ally shared that his poetry might be a form of activism. But as he was speaking, he abruptly stopped mid-sentence and looked up. His eyes grew wide, he raised his eyebrows, tilted his head to the side, elevated his voice, and then, with a big smile said:

> **Ally:** Did I tell you I tried to beat up a White boy in class?
>
> **Gerson:** Yea, you told me that. The class you would always be late to.
>
> **Ali:** You see, that would be activism for me.
>
> **Gerson:** Beating up a White boy?
>
> **Ally:** Yea, definitely.
>
> **Gerson:** Why? What did he say?
>
> **Ally:** We were learning about the carceral system, how much it costs to incarcerate people, and the percentage that were Black and Brown. And he was, like, "Well, wouldn't they just be on welfare if not?" Then he tried to get all buddy-buddy with a Black girl that was in my group. And I was, like, Yo, I'mma start talking crazy because I asked myself as revolutionary: Am I a revolutionary if I don't fuck this cracker up?

Bobbing his head back and forth, Ally chuckled as he shared this story with me. I responded:

> **Gerson:** Was he like White-White? American White?
>
> **Ally:** Jewish. Pretty sure he's Zionist.
>
> **Gerson:** So, you didn't beat him up? So, does that kind of take away your revolutionary card for that moment?
>
> **Ally:** No, I tried [to beat him up, but did not physically hit him]. No, no it doesn't [take away my revolutionary card]. I like to think I created something in that space that was worthwhile. I asked one of my homeboys right after, 'yo I didn't spin [beat him up] him, I should've?' I asked him that question. And he said, 'na, I think you did fine. I think your aggression in that space that has never seen aggression like that was called for.' And then I stalked him [the White classmate] on Facebook and he was super Zionist, super republican, and right-wing, super racist and Border Patrol. So yeah, I was happy with my decision. If I would have stood [beat him up] on him, I may have gotten kicked out of school and lost

> everything. But fuck it, it is what it is; people are losing everything every single day.

To begin, I want to distinguish between two moments enmeshed with anger. One moment that deactivated Ally and another that activated him.

The first moment Ally felt anger was when the classmate said, “well, wouldn’t they [Black and Brown people] just be on welfare if [they were not in prison]?” From Ally’s description, it seems that the classmate said this as a general comment; the comment was not necessarily directed at any particular person. Be that is it may, Ally became angry with the classmate’s commentary. As Kathleen Woodward points out, anger can come as a result of social injustices.[1] However, anger did not necessarily activate Ally. By this I mean that anger did not compel him to move or say anything.

This is not to say that anger was unfelt, but rather, that anger either paralyzed Ally or harnessed him, at least for a moment. Yes, the classmate’s comments incited anger in Ally, but in that particular moment, for however many seconds, Ally did not move or act on his emotion. As such, this anger was one of deactivation. Just to reiterate, deactivation refers to the ways people are immobilized or restrained, particularly for political purposes. At first, Ally’s anger did not compel him to say anything to the classmate. His anger did not induce him to attack the classmate. Instead, his anger shaped his behavior in such a way that caused him to restrain himself and stay silent.

In liberal societies, citizens are expected to exercise their liberties in a “responsible” fashion.[2] The expression of anger, by those not in the dominant class, or who Peter Lyman refers to as the “powerless,”[3] threatens the political order of liberal societies. As a result, attempts are made to “domesticate”[4] the anger of the oppressed. Ally's comportment, one of deactivation (i.e., silence and restraint), was not only a governmental attempt to shape his own behavior, but perhaps, his behavior was also indicative of an attempt to domesticate his own anger. If only for a few seconds, Ally either advertently or inadvertently acquiesced to the domestication of the non-dominant class. Ally's deactivation, however, had an ephemeral quality. The subsequent actions of the White classmate induced Ally’s movement.

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[1] Kathleen Woodward, *Statistical Panic: Cultural Politics and Poetics of the Emotions,* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 75.

[2] Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society,* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999), 117.

I described the first moment in this story as one of deactivation. The next moment, also comprised of anger, activated Ally to act. After the offensive comment, the classmate attempted to be “buddy-buddy”[5] with the Black woman who was in Ally’s group. Already angry, it seems that the White classmate's attempt to be “buddy-buddy” propelled Ally to physically fight the classmate. Ally’s inclination to fight is no doubt masculinist. Michael Kimmel has described violence and the “willingness to fight” as a fundamental expression of manhood.[6] But not only did Ally try to beat up the classmate, but he also considered this to be a form of activism. Initially, I was unclear what Ally meant by “tried to beat up.” I was unsure if there had been an actual physical altercation. I followed up with Ally on March 25, 2021, regarding what he meant by “tried to beat up.”

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[3] Peter Lyman, “The Domestication of Anger: The Use and Abuse of Anger in Politics,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 7, no. 2 (2004): 133-147, 134.
[4] Ibid., 136.
[5] “Buddy-buddy” refers to making jokes or trying to be friendly or even flirtatious with a person.
[6] Michael S. Kimmel, “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity,” in *Feminism & Masculinitie*s ed. Peter F. Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 182-199, 189.

I called Ally on the phone. Ally was driving to donate food to people who are homeless in Miami. Even though two years have passed from our initial interview, I asked Ally if I could follow up with him regarding the issue; he obliged. I asked the following:

> **Gerson:** What exactly did you mean by “tried to beat up”?
>
> **Ally:** We were in class. After he [the White boy] said his remarks, I told him I was not going to tolerate it.

Next, according to Ally, the White classmate stood up and said “what are you going to do?” Once the White classmate stood up, this also activated Ally, prompting him to stand up. Ally told me that his next words to the classmate were, “you better sit your lil [little] ass down.” According to Ally, the teacher noticed this exchange. In fact, the whole class noticed the altercation. Once the class noticed, both the White classmate and Ally sat down.

So far, we are seeing the way activations can be compounded. The first moment of activation was when Ally told the White classmate that he was not going to tolerate his actions. It was at this moment that Ally reflected and asked himself, “am I a revolutionary if I don't fuck this cracker up?” For Ally, failing to beat up the White classmate could jeopardize his revolutionary identity. The second moment of activation prompted Ally to stand up and tell the White classmate to sit his “lil ass down.” This altercation happened as class was ending. Ally went on to say that as class was ending, he noticed that a girl was looking at him.

> **Ally:** A girl looked at me like I was an animal, with shame or embarrassment, as if I didn’t conduct myself appropriately in a situation. She looked at me no different than an animal, which at the time probably hurt my feelings and upset me because up to that point we had cool relations. It was some Afro-Latina girl.

> She said to me, ‘you think acting like that is appropriate?’ I said to her, ‘fuck you bitch!’ I really meant that.
>
> **Gerson:** You said that?
>
> **Ally:** Hell yea! She’s a bitch. She probably voted for Biden. I’m aware I shouldn’t call women bitches. But if you acting like a bitch Imma [I’m going to] call you a bitch, whether you’re a woman, man, or non-gender binary. The way she judged me upset me so much. It reminded me of the way people have judged me my whole life.

As Ally was sharing these details, I wrote in my notes, “it’s almost as if this story triggered him in some capacity. His voice fluctuated, from elevated to monotone. When he said, ‘Hell yea. She’s a bitch,’ his voice elevated. It’s almost as if he was getting angry all over again” (Date: March 25, 2021).

As I mentioned, both Ally and the White classmate sat down at the end of class. Sitting down, or rather, the restraint of movement, could also be deemed as a type of deactivation. But it was the other classmate, the one who looked at Ally as if he were an “animal,” who reactivated Ally. Her words, as Ally stated, upset him so much. His anger motivated his response to the classmate, “fuck you bitch!” Towards the end of our phone conversation on March 25, 2021, Ally stated that the engagement with the White classmate ensued for about fifteen minutes after class was over. At one point, both Ally and the White classmate got in each other’s face, but not once, did anyone actually touch each other. No punches or kicks where thrown.

Once the incident came to an end, Ally mentioned that he spoke with his friend about the situation. Evidently, his friend described Ally's actions as “aggression,” but appropriate. Woodward describes aggression as a “drive to action.”[7] In this case, aggression drove Ally to almost fight the classmate. However, Lyman proposes that aggression is another form of anger that is subject to domestication. Domesticated aggression, according to Lyman, "implies obedience to an order from a legitimate authority."[8] In this situation, the legitimate authority was the university that domesticated his anger. Yes, Ally wanted to physically fight. In fact, he argues that fighting in such a situation is activism. Fighting, then, according to Ally, might be another trait that comprises a culture of activism. And yet, instead of physically fighting, Ally policed his actions and domesticated his aggression in an effort to not lose "everything."

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[7] Woodward, *Statistical Panic,* 35.

In this example, we have seen how the emotion of anger both deactivated and activated Ally. Anger was brought on by what Ally rationalized as unjust comments on behalf of his classmates. At first, anger deactivated Ally. Instead of propelling him to act, anger actually halted, restrained, and silenced Ally. Moments later, in response to his classmates' actions, Ally was induced by anger and physically compelled to act. While his actions may have been deemed as aggressive, his anger was ultimately domesticated. In other words, his aggression was contained, thus shaping and restricting his behavior yet again.

This story is an illustration of a volatile emotion. Any emotion can propel or thwart the body, either in good or bad ways, even love. Anger can easily manifest into physical acts, particularly for men, thus, exposing the gendered aspect of anger. Ally's response to the classmates were masculinist, manifesting in a compulsion to physical and verbal violence. Such an emotion is demonstrative of a kind of anger that is seen as problematic in a racial sense but also somewhat reasonable in a gendered sense. Men in particular, are socialized to not only be angry, but also, to act on their anger to protect women, children, or when they (men) are offended. Given how men are socialized, we might say that Ally had a socially appropriate response as man. However, because Ally is not a White man, his anger is always problematic.

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[8] Lyman, "The Domestication of Anger," 136.

This story also highlights the complexity of deactivation and activation. Such concepts must not be thought of as linear acts that happen chronologically or in any particular order. At times, it can be difficult to distinguish between deactivation and activation. As demonstrated in this example, deactivation and activation can be messy concepts and can occur within seconds of each other. As such, it can be difficult to pinpoint the exact moment of where deactivation and activation occurs. What is important here, is to notice the way individuals are moved or restrained through emotions at various moments. While this analysis explores an incident that happened in class, it might also provide insight into some of the ways that anger activates and also deactivates individuals within a liberal society.

Combustible Anger

Ally's story also implores us to explore the combustible capacity of an activating anger. In the moment where Ally was activated by anger, he asked himself, “am I a revolutionary if I don't fuck this cracker up?” Ally could have used many other descriptors, ones less racially charged; instead, he used a pejorative, cracker. Following this moment, Ally expressed his anger outwardly, which almost turned into a physical fight. Anger as an activator, then, seems to have a combustible quality. Yes, anger as an activator might move the individual to act, but like a fire, anger has the ability to burn others and the self. By no means am I proposing that Ally's anger is misplaced. I am proposing that while anger may propel the individual to act, it might also lead the individual to hurt themselves and others.

I will analyze Loretta Devine and Matt Dillon's characters from the film, *Crash*, to explore further the flammable quality of anger.[9] This film does an excellent job at highlighting how quickly we, as a society, capitulate and resort to racist invectives in moments of anger. Particularly, how quickly we resort to prejudicial attitudes when we are in a situation that is at a boiling point; living in a large city always produces, boiling points. We got robbed at gun point—racist invective; we get in a car accident—racist invective; someone takes the parking spot we wanted—racist invective. Dillon's character allows us to see how moments of anger can structure notions of identity, thus, activating racist reactions.

In the film *Crash*, Loretta Devine plays the character of Shaniqua Johnson, a health insurance agent. In one scene, we learn that Officer John Ryan's father has a urinary tract infection which causes him so much pain that he is unable to sleep at night. Frustrated by his father's condition, Officer Ryan, played by Matt Dillon, calls the insurance company on behalf of his father. Ms. Johnson answers the phone and Officer Ryan begins to explain his father's condition. He describes his father's condition as an "emergency." Ms. Johnson explains that his father has been to the clinic three times in the past month. In a calm tone, she says, "he [Ryan's father] has been treated for a urinary tract infection which is by no means an emergency." As Ms. Johnson is speaking, Officer

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[9] *Crash*, directed by Paul Haggis (2004).

Ryan displays a sense of exhaustion; he is standing against the wall, holding the payphone with his left hand, breathing heavily, and brushing his right hand against his face. Ms. Johnson offers, “if you have any more questions about your HMO plan, why don't you make an appointment and come in between 10-4, Monday through Friday.”

Elevating his voice, Officer Ryan replies, “what is my father supposed to do about sleeping tonight?” Ms. Johnson rolls her eyes, also raises her voice, not in a threatening, but puzzled and almost snappy manner, and replies, “I don't know. I'm not a doctor.” Now Officer Ryan rolls his eyes and says, “I want to talk to your supervisor.” In a more assertive tone Ms. Johnson responds, “I am my supervisor.” Officer Ryan proceeds to ask for Ms. Johnson's name. She replies, “Shaniqua Johnson.” Officer Ryan says, “Shaniqua? Big fucking surprise that is.” Not tolerating Officer Ryan's behavior, Ms. Johnson aggressively slams and hangs up the phone. With a smirk on his face, Officer Ryan also hangs up the phone.

Woodward proposes that numerous forms of “bureaucratic emotions” exist. For Woodward, bureaucratic emotions refer to the emotions we feel in relation to bureaucratic structures (e.g., insurance agencies). While these emotions may feel personal, Woodward suggests that they are highly “impersonal.” These emotions are characterized as impersonal because most of the time, “we do not know the people with whom we come into contact....understanding them only as representatives of the bureaucracy.”[10] Bureaucratic emotions are also considered to be “wildly out of line.”[11] In the case of Officer Ryan, he was frustrated and concerned about his father’s condition.

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[10] Kathleen Woodward, “Bureaucratic and Binding Emotions: Angry American Autobiography,” *The Kenyon Review* 17, no. 1 (1995): 55-70, 61.
[11] Ibid., 60.

He called the insurance company to learn about his options for medical care. Officer Ryan was not pleased with Ms. Johnson's responses, which transitioned his anger into what Woodward calls "bureaucratic rage."

Officer Ryan's anger was impersonal. He was not necessarily angry with Ms. Johnson, he did not know her. Woodward describes that bureaucratic anger can be incited by an "impersonal, unsympathetic, unyielding bureaucratic structure."[12] Ms. Johnson's response, "I don't know. I'm not a doctor," could be characterized as unsympathetic and also impersonal. The impersonal response was not necessarily surprising, as Ms. Johnson was following standard operating procedures which are supposed to divert emotions. Nevertheless, Officer Ryan was annoyed and displeased with her answer, thus, he asked to speak with Ms. Johnson's supervisor. When Officer Ryan found out that no one else could help him because Ms. Johnson was in fact her supervisor, he asked for her name.

Part of what makes bureaucratic emotions impersonal is that contact is highly mediated. Woodward notes that "many people will not even tell us their names if we ask them point-blank on the phone."[13] However, in the case of Ms. Johnson, she did tell Officer Ryan her name, Shaniqua Johnson. Benjamin Baez argues that language, names in particular, constitute us, makes us "male or female…[and] makes us subjects of ethnicity."[14] If names have the capacity to reveal so much about us, then we might say that uttering her name, Shaniqua Johnson, made her knowable as a Black woman to Officer Ryan.

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[12] Ibid., 59.

[13] Ibid., 61.

[14] Benjamin Baez, "Learning to Forget: Reflections on Identity and Language," *Journal of Latinos and Education* 1, no. 2 (2002): 123-132, 129.

The combination of Officer Ryan's anger along with now knowing Ms. Johnson's name activated his prejudice. But Ms. Johnson's name did not register with Officer Ryan until his emotion activated him. Had the interaction between the two been positive, then the racial/gender character of the exchange might have been mediated. But this was not the case. Woodward suggests that bureaucratic emotions are "site specific."[15] The site, in this case, could be understood as the interaction between Ms. Johnson and Officer Ryan. Before uttering her name, Officer Ryan had not displayed any sense of racist undertones. But once he was at his tipping point and heard Ms. Johnson's name, anger fueled his racial attitude.

This anger prompted Officer Ryan to capitulate to what our society teaches us to do in moments of boiling points, deploy racist invectives. Officer Ryan's anger made Ms. Johnson a racial target. Situations such as these are not necessarily novel; racism is not aberrational. As Patricia Williams points out, "this is an old conundrum, to find the sight and the sound of oneself a red flag."[16] Anger, frustration, and prejudice made Ms. Johnson a target or a red flag. Officer Ryan now had a place to lock onto, a place where he could deploy his anger, rage, and frustration.

Antoine Banks suggests that there is a strong connection between anger and racial attitudes. Banks argues that anger "provides the foundation on which contemporary White racial attitudes are structured."[17] Banks further proposes that because anger fuels and structures much of racial attitudes, scapegoating becomes a way in which the dominant group justifies their prejudicial attitudes. Considering Banks' argument, anger, was what structured Officer Ryan's racial attitude. Anger also fueled his outward expression, not towards the insurance agent, but towards a Black woman. As such, his anger became racial. Once his anger became racial, Officer Ryan now had someone to blame for his father's unfortunate medical condition. At once, his anger was legitimized and his blame was justified by Ms. Johnson's identity.

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[15] Woodward, "Bureaucratic and Angry Emotions," 60.

[16] Patricia Williams, *Seeing a Color-Blind Future: The Paradox of Race*, (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997), 37.

[17] Antoine J. Banks, *Anger and Racial Politics: The Emotional Foundation of Racial Attitudes in America*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 18.

This example from the film highlights the flammable nature of anger. Whether for good or evil, anger carries the capacity to move us in various ways. Anger is an emotion that can produce numerous effects in the individual. In this film, Officer Ryan is involved numerous horrible situations. Not only does he have another racist encounter with Ms. Johnson, but in another scene, Officer Ryan racially profiles a Black husband and wife. Officer Ryan also goes as far as to sexually assault the wife. Unlike the scenes with Ms. Johnson, in the scene with the Black couple, Officer Ryan's appalling actions were not induced by rage. Without a doubt, Officer Ryan proves to be a horrible character throughout the film. And yet, in one scene, he risks his life to save a civilian, who also happens to be the Black woman who he sexually assaulted. Woodward may have a point when she argues that in certain occasions rage can reach a point where it can alienate "you from yourself, annihilating your better self."[18]

Summary

Banks refers to anger and fear as "negative emotions."[19] And yet, in the next sentence, describes anger as a "powerful force." For Foucault, power should not be understood in negative terms, but rather, as a productive entity.[20] As I have argued throughout these chapters, activations, like power, are also productive. That is, they produce ways of being, ways of acting, particularly as it relates to political endeavors. Emotions are a powerful force because they carry the capacity to deactivate or activate.

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[18] Woodward, "Bureaucratic and Angry Emotions," 64.

[19] Banks, *Anger and Racial Politics*, 18.

I began this chapter by depicting a story where Ally was deactivated and activated by anger. For good or for bad, any emotion can propel or halt the body. Ally's anger came as a result of two classmates. Initially, despite being angry, Ally did not move. This is not to say that he did not shape his behavior in any capacity. As we saw, deactivation can also be governmental. At first, Ally's anger halted his movement, in fact, he did not say a word; he was silent. Perhaps, then, this may have been an example of what Lyman calls the domestication of anger. In a liberal society individuals must act in a responsible manner. Expressing anger for those of the none dominant class (i.e., not White) is not tolerable in liberal societies. As such, anger must be domesticated, which can occur in myriad ways. Following this moment, perhaps only seconds later, Ally was activated by anger. And as I pointed out, this anger was compounded by numerous situations that occurred in the classroom.

On the one hand, this might speak to the ways the domestication of anger or governmental attempts often fail. Instead of holding back, Ally was induced by anger to almost fight with his classmate. And yet, Ally did not follow through with his desire to fight. He decided that a physical altercation would get him kicked out of school. In the end, it does seem that Ally's aggression was once again domesticated. Ally's reaction, the use of the pejorative “cracker,” also led us to explore anger’s combustible quality. To explore anger’s more flammable activating capacity, I analyzed a scene from the film, *Crash.*

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[20] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1977), 194.

As I have already mentioned in this dissertation, anyone can be an activator in a culture of activism. Because activations have a relational characteristic, individuals can be activated in numerous ways, which includes emotions. Anger has the potential to be a powerful force which can quickly become violent. I am not arguing that violence is good or bad, but rather, that it can come as a result of anger and rage. Not only this, but like fear, anger can also serve as a framework to conceptualize identity. In the case of Officer Ryan, I argued that the name of the representative, Shaniqua Johnson, registered with him once he was at his boiling point. And because anger is one of the ways racial attitudes are structured, this motivated Officer Ryan's racist response. His anger was legitimized by her identity, allowing him to blame Ms. Johnson for his father's misfortune.

Within a culture of activism, emotions, particularly anger, is dangerous and potent. In situations where anger compels individuals to move, it might even lead to engage in harmful, violent behaviors (e.g., racism, homophobia, sexism, ableism, classism). Not only this, but in the case of both Ally and Officer Ryan, we saw how easily both individuals capitulated to the use of racial and even sexist invectives (e.g., “cracker” or “bitch”). Judith Butler does argue that context matters in the way we understand harmful language.[21] Nevertheless, this is not an indictment towards Ally or Officer Ryan’s character, but rather, an analysis regarding some of the possible ways anger shapes our behaviors. Next, I will continue to explore the role of activating emotions, particularly love and rage in relation to Marwa.

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[21] Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 13.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A SEQUENCE OF ACTIVATING EMOTIONS: LOVE AND RAGE

I have proposed in the previous two chapters that emotions have the capacity to activate or deactivate the individual. Either for good or bad, any emotion can induce the body into movement or impede the body from movement. Emotions can move us in particular ways (activate), but they can also halt, restrict, or even silence us (deactivate). In the prior chapter, I explored the volatile emotion of anger. I highlighted some of the ways anger can deactivate and activate the activist. I also explored what I call the "combustible" nature of anger. Yes, anger can be a productive force, but anger can also be volatile, particularly as it relates to bureaucratic rage. And as we saw in the last chapter, anger might also be an emotion that structures the way we conceptualize identity in certain moments.

In this chapter I want to explore a different understanding of rage. Yes, bureaucratic rage is one way rage can manifest; there are other iterations as well. I am interested in the way rage is produced by love. Once produced, rage carries the capacity to drive, move, and guide activists. To build my argument, I draw from numerous sources of data: an interview with Marwa; participant observations; a blog written by Marwa; a cartoon show called Dragon Ball Z; and academic literature. First, I will start with a scene from Dragon Ball Z to highlight the way love can lead to rage, which can in turn activate the individual. The analysis of this cartoon show serves as a foundation for the rest of my analysis in the chapter.

Dragon Ball Z: A Love That Leads to Rage

I want to begin outlining the way love can lead to rage. While Marwa is the focus of this chapter, analyzing a scene from this cartoon show might open up a space to theorize about the connection between love and rage. In fact, many of my ideas regarding the activation of emotions began after I watched this particular episode. Dragon Ball Z (DBZ) is a Japanese animated cartoon show (anime). This cartoon show deals with different beings who fight against those who threaten the safety of the planet.

The main characters of the cartoon are called *Saiyans*. Saiyans are able to heighten their physical abilities, or power up, at any moment.

In addition to great strength, Saiyans can also: fly, release balls of energy from their hands, and also transform their physical bodies to become more powerful. Saiyans tend to transform or power up when they are fighting. While they are able to fight at any power level, Saiyans usually choose to power up in the midst of battle. The more they power up, the more powerful they become. If Saiyans power up enough, they can achieve an advanced transformation called Super Saiyan. The Super Saiyan form endows Saiyans with more strength than their prior form. But in order to transform, they must but fueled by emotions, specifically, rage.

One episode[1] in particular demonstrates the transformation process more vividly than others. In this episode, Vegeta, one of the main Saiyan characters, is fighting in a martial arts tournament. In the tournament, he is paired to fight against a young Saiyan, Cabba, who resides on another planet. Both challengers are called to the fighting platform. Vegeta, an older, more mature fighter, towers over the young, skinny Cabba. With an assertive tone, standing upright, with a slight grin on his face, displaying a certain confidence, Vegeta says to the young Cabba, “so, it seems you're going to be my next opponent.” Cabba, with a shaky voice, eyes looking down, responds “yes.” Cabba pauses, takes a few seconds, and slightly bows to Vegeta as a sign of deference to the more senior fighter. Cabba follows up and says, “I look forward to fighting you.” Immediately, Vegeta grunts, his eyebrows pushed down, eyes focused on his opponent, and elevates his voice saying, “No holding back! You give it your all!” Cabba stands back and studders, “right, I intend to.”

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[1] *Dragon Ball Super*, Season 1, Ep. 37, directed by Ryota Nakamura and Tatsuya Nagamine, (2015).

Once the battle begins, Cabba wastes no time; in an effort to land the first punch he flies directly towards Vegeta. Cabba begins to yell, “ahhhhhhh!” Punch after punch, swing after swing, Vegeta blocks every hit. Then Vegeta begins to yell, “ahhhhhh!” Vegeta takes a forceful swing; Cabba ducks and uppercuts Vegeta in the stomach. Cabba follows up with another punch, this time, Vegeta grabs his arm, admonishing Cabba, “pace yourself.”

Cabba grunts, with his eyebrows pushed down, a snarl on his face, ignores Vegeta and punches again; he misses. Vegeta kicks Cabba. At this point, Cabba is breathing heavy, sweating, and panting profusely. Vegeta asks once again with a slight laugh and grin, “What's wrong? Tuckered out already?” As Vegeta is speaking, Cabba releases a ball of energy towards him. Vegeta also responds with a ball of energy. Vegeta acknowledges that they are evenly matched at their natural, non-Super Saiyan state. Vegeta suggests that they both transform to the super Saiyan level to make the battle more interesting.

Releasing a puzzled, yet stammered, “ugh,” Cabba shares with Vegeta that he does not know how to transform into a Super Saiyan. Subsequently, Cabba bows in deference. With his shoulders shrugged, arms neatly pressed against his sides, Cabba petitions, “I'm begging you, Vegeta sir, teach me how to transform like you do. Please, I beseech you.” Vegeta folds his arms and releases a grunt. Cabba continues to speak, “On behalf of my family, waiting for me back on Sedala [Cabba's home planet], I want to become stronger so I can bring true peace to our universe, I beg you.” Vegeta begins to power up. The ground is shaking, the wind is beginning to blow harder, still grunting, Vegeta tells Cabba, “You disappoint me. Asking your opponent for a lesson, in the midst of battle. It's shameful, you're a disgrace.” The wind blowing even harder now, Vegeta takes on the golden glow that a Saiyan takes before transforming. Cabba appears nervous; he begins to sweat, his mouth is wide open, eyes expanded, and eyebrows raised.

Immediately, Vegeta transforms into a Super Saiyan, releases a loud grunt, and flies towards Cabba landing a striking blow. Laughing, Vegeta begins to beat the life out of Cabba, pushing him towards death. Body in the air and eyes closed, life begins to leave Cabba’s body; he whispers, “I give up.” As Cabba's body is falling to the ground, Vegeta catches him by the shirt and says, “if you quit on me, I will kill you.” With his head tilted back, barely able to open his eyes, Cabba lays there lifeless listening to Vegeta. Vegeta says, “Enough, I'm ending this now.” While holding Cabba with his right hand, Vegeta initiates a ball of energy with his left, preparing to kill Cabba. Exhausted and hurt, Cabba lays there, waiting to die.

Vegeta continues to speak, “and once the fight is over, I'm going to blow your stupid planet Sedala to smithereens.” Suddenly, but only for a moment, Cabba slightly opens his eyes, reacting to Vegeta's threat. Vegeta continues, “but first, I'm going to hunt down and murder, one by one, every last member of your family. For them, it won't be quick.” As Vegeta is uttering this last word, Cabba swipes Vegeta's hand, widens his eyes, pushes back, and begins to take on the signature Saiyan glow. Eyes watering, enunciating slowly, and elevating his voice, Cabba says, “the people of Sedala are innocent; they have nothing to do with this. If you do anything to my home planet or anything to my family, I will MAKE YOU PAY!” It is at this moment where Cabba achieves the Super Saiyan transformation; Vegeta grins. Cabba is overtaken by fury and rage; he goes on the offensive, yelling at the top of his lungs. With all his energy, he thrusts forward; rage fueling every punch and kick, Cabba is relentless. It is rage that strengthens Cabba.

Without a doubt, Cabba was fighting with full force; Vegeta was not. Vegeta was allowing Cabba to see what it felt like to fight at the Super Saiyan level. With yet another grin across his face, Vegeta said, “alright, that'll do. Don't forget that sensation.” Unaware of Vegeta's plan, Cabba was shocked. Cabba stepped back, stopped fighting, and listened to Vegeta, “the best trigger for the Super Saiyan transformation is anger, so hold on to that feeling you just had.”

Vegeta instructs Cabba to try the Super Saiyan transformation again. Listening to Vegeta, Cabba begins to yell as loud as he can; he quickly transforms into a Super Saiyan. Vegeta acknowledges that the reason he made death threats was to make Cabba angry. However, there are numerous super Saiyan levels. And at that moment, Vegeta decides to transform to yet another level; within an instant, he punches Cabba, knocking the breath out of him. Vegeta looks down at Cabba with an intense, cold stare, and whispers, “remember this pain, and let it activate you.”

For the purposes of my analysis, I will focus on the way anger was utilized to activate Cabba. We notice that Cabba is unfamiliar with the process of transformation; he asks Vegeta to teach him. Cabba even provides the reason for his petition, “On behalf of my family, waiting for me back on Sedala, I want to become stronger so I can bring true peace to our universe, I beg you.” Invoking his family, Cabba shares that he wants to learn to become a Super Saiyan, not for selfish or hedonistic reasons, but rather, to protect his universe. Love for his family and universe drives Cabba's desire to become stronger. Understanding this, Vegeta weaponizes this information to make Cabba angry.

At this moment, Vegeta begins to incessantly beat Cabba. Kick after kick, punch after punch, Cabba is pushed to the brink of death. Once Cabba is decimated, Vegeta begins to taunt and threaten his family and universe. Interestingly, when Vegeta was pounding on Cabba, Cabba was not activated to transform into a Super Saiyan. It was not until Vegeta began to threaten his loved ones, that Cabba was activated. There is a sequence of emotions here. The etiology of Cabba's anger and rage was love. Once Vegeta begins his threats, it is Cabba's love that welcomes his anger. According to Vegeta, anger, is the best trigger for the Super Saiyan transformation. Peter Lyman proposes that anger and rage are distinct “moments in angry encounters.”[2] Whereas anger is “speech about a perceived injustice,” rage follows anger as a “response to the refusal to listen to that appeal for justice."[3] Failing to have a dialogical response to anger, according to Lyman, will result in a forthcoming rage.

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[2] Peter Lyman, “The Domestication of Anger: The Use and Abuse of Anger in Politics,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 7, no. 2 (2004): 133-147, 140.

After being brutalized, Vegeta begins to threaten Cabba's loved ones. At this point, Cabba was laying lifeless in the hands of Vegeta, waiting for his imminent death. Once the threats begin, anger activates Cabba. It is anger that brings Cabba back to life. Once he frees himself from Vegeta, Cabba verbally responds to Vegeta before fighting. I will break Cabba's response in two sections. First, Cabba says, "the people of Sedala are innocent; they have nothing to do with this. If you do anything to my home planet or anything to my family…" Possibly, the speech depicted here was anger.

Cabba's anger reflects a concern with a perceived, forthcoming injustice (i.e., the murder of his family and universe). After experiencing Vegeta's menacing violence, Cabba understood that no dialogical response would assuage Vegeta's threat. Which is why Cabba finishes his response, by yelling at the top of his lungs, "I will MAKE YOU PAY!" It is at this precise moment when Cabba utters the word, "will," that Cabba transforms into a Super Saiyan and begins his onslaught of punches and kicks. Cabba's anger had now developed into rage. Love, anger, and rage induced Cabba to shape his conduct, thus propelling him to transform into a Super Saiyan.

When Cabba realized the threats were part of Vegeta's educational plot, the fight comes to an end. In a sense, Cabba was deactivated. However, Vegeta had one more lesson for Cabba. Vegeta powers up and punches Cabba, knocking the air out of him. Vegeta whispers, "remember this pain, and let it activate you." For Cabba, emotional and physical pain operate differently. Physical pain did not activate his Super Saiyan transformation, it was emotional pain. The thought of losing his loved ones induced Cabba's anger, rage, and, thus, activation. But for Vegeta, it seems that pain is something that can be remembered or called upon for the purposes of activation. In other words, one does not necessarily need to experience or feel pain in that given moment in order to be activated. Activation can come as a result of remembering the sensation of pain, in other words, a memory.

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[3] Ibid., 140.

So far, I have utilized an episode from Dragon Ball Z to provide a framework for my upcoming analysis of the activist. Through this episode of DBZ, I explored a sequence of emotions: love, anger, and rage. I have proposed that when the threat of attack is directed at a loved one, anger, and inevitably rage ensues. In this particular example the etiology of rage is love. Rage carries the capacity to activate. Rage gives us strength and shapes our behaviors, propelling us to fight for those we love. But what might this mean for the activist?

Marwa’s Love and Rage

In this section, I will continue to analyze the role of rage and love as it pertains to the activation of the activist. Like anger and fear, emotions such as rage and love can also be frameworks that inform our understanding of identity. First, I will analyze two moments from my interviews with Marwa. I hope to demonstrate how such emotions can activate and also work as a prism for conceptualizing identity. I will also analyze a blog written by Marwa published in RaceBaitr. RaceBaitr is a website that publishes various articles, dedicated to “imagining and working toward a world outside of the White supremacist, cisheteropatriarchal, capitalistic gaze, with a particular attention to the function of anti-Blackness."[4] I now turn to my interviews with Marwa.

On May 11, 2019, I attended a Dream Defenders event with Marwa at a public library in Broward County. The meeting was from 4 pm-6 pm; I arrived twenty minutes early. To my surprise, Marwa had arrived hours earlier. When I entered the library, Marwa was to the right of the entrance. She was sitting at a table with her sister. Head down, books open, Marwa was focused studying for the MCAT. The purpose of the Dream Defenders meeting was to address police brutality and mass incarceration. After the meeting, I had follow up questions; we walked outside towards the front of the library.

Marwa stood a few feet in front of me, leaning against the outside wall of the library. One observation that I wrote during the meeting was, "when talking about police brutality, she [Marwa] mentioned Black men, but nothing about Black women…interesting." As such, our conversation outside of the library reflected a concern with race and gender. Marwa said, "I've been reading a lot of Afro-pessimism." I was not familiar with the concept so I asked Marwa to explain it to me:

> [Afro-pessimism means] you have to destroy the world because modernity, the modern world, is basically built on an anti-Black medium. So any other concepts that come from the humanities and whatnot, everything else is human except for Blackness; the Black being is not human. That's why for me, even when you asked about gender, I feel Black people kind of exist outside of it for me. I feel like for Black people, we [Black people] need to come up with a different concept or language altogether to describe exactly what we're talking about when we talk about specific violences because we understand that the violence we are victims of orients more than just gender or class.

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[4] "About Us," *RaceBaitr*, https://racebaitr.com/about/.

Afro-pessimism is a concept that Marwa has gravitated towards. One important aspect that Marwa highlights regarding Afro-pessimism is that in our current state of the world, Black people are not considered human.

Afro-pessimism also rejects the conflation of Black people with other people color because there are certain violences that are specific to only Black people.[5] Normative conceptualizations of gender are inadequate according to Marwa because they fail to encapsulate the violence endured by Black people. Marwa proposes that Black people should create their own concept or language to describe better the violences they endure. Marwa went on to say:

> What is the violence that pre-mediates through everything? For me, how I see it, is anti-Blackness. It [anti-Blackness] is how we understand and construct the world, even how we construct gender. It's [anti-Blackness] basically what we use to construct everything else since we've been born. We've been born into this world, this medium of anti-Blackness. Colorism is so entrenched and you need to take years and years to get over it [colorism].

Still standing against the library wall, Marwa did not clench her fists or display any outwardly physical expression of angst. Marwa did not scream, yell, or elevate her voice.

Calmly, once again, she reiterated that in her view, anti-Blackness is a fundamental aspect that constructs the way Black people are constructed, and thus viewed in the world. Even more, Marwa argues that anti-Blackness is what constructs the world. Lyman describes that anger becomes noticeable because it is enacted through the "meta-languages of emotion – tones of voice, non-verbal gestures." However, from Marwa's appearance, disposition, and voice, she did not *appear* angry. If violence is the

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[5] Victor Erik Ray, Antonia Randolph, Megan Underhill, and David Luke, "Critical Race Theory, Afro-Pessimism, and Racial Progress Narratives," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 3, no. 2 (2017): 147-158, 149.

"single most evident marker of manhood"[6] as Michael Kimmel suggests, then we might surmise that women, particularly Black women, have less options, socially, to physically display anger or rage. This is not to say, however, that Marwa was not enraged.

Rage has many iterations and can manifest in manifold ways. There are times, according to Woodward, where rage can be invisible, motionless, unconscious, or even silent.[7] As I mentioned before, Marwa was at a Dream Defenders meeting in solidarity and alongside other community organizers. These individuals showed up because they care about the eradication of systemic racism, specifically, mass incarceration and police brutality. At this particular moment, Marwa's rage was not motionless, unconscious, or silent, but perhaps it was invisible.

I describe her rage as invisible because there were no outward "meta-languages" signaling her rage. In this particular moment, the evidence of her rage lied in the substance of what she was highlighting. According to Marwa, there is no way to repair a world that insists on perpetuating violence on Black life. And because the world is predicated on anti-Blackness, according to Marwa's understanding of Afro-pessimism, it must be "destroyed." Her outward cynicism makes her rage, and also love, knowable.

But the reason she is cynical or the reason she is enraged, is because she loves Blackness, and as a result, hates that which oppresses them. Therefore, Marwa's rage and love are fueled by her hatred for anti-Black oppression. In my time with Marwa, she never actually uttered the words "I love Black people." But it is through the substance of her words and commitments that we come to grasp her love for Black people. For Marwa, love might be understood as an affinity for those who suffer, in this case, Black people.[8] I will provide another example to elucidate this point.

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[6] Michael S. Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity," in *Feminism & Masculinitie*s ed. Peter F. Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 182-199, 189.

[7] Kathleen Woodward, *Statistical Panic: Cultural Politics and Poetics of the Emotions*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 69-70.

As I stated earlier in the dissertation, my first conversation with Marwa took place on April 5, 2019. We met in a small study room in the FIU library. As we were speaking, I asked Marwa about her involvements regarding social justice. Marwa said:

> **Marwa:** I guess during the Muslim ban I co-founded an awareness campaign/group: Solidarity for Detained Somalis. The Muslim ban originally was against seven Muslim majority countries. During the Muslim ban, I saw them [society] super, super, hyper, hyper focused on Arab [Muslims]. Sudan and Somalia are on that list. They're Black Muslims, they're Black African Muslims. And they are not being talked about at all.

At first, Marwa was monotone. She was communicating in a calm, relaxed manner. Her facial gestures were neutral, her head was not making any movement, and her hands were on her lap.

However, when Marwa said “Sudan and Somalia are on that list. They're Black Muslims, they're Black African Muslims and they are not being talked about at all,” her demeanor changed. Her voice was now elevated, head tilted, eyebrows lowered forming wrinkles on her forehead, and her nostrils flared out. At this point in the conversation, Marwa began to express her rage not only verbally, but physically as well. When she finished this statement, Marwa went back to sitting calmly in her chair. Once again, she did not move; she spoke with a monotone voice, hands went back to the side, and her legs were crossed. Marwa continued:

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[8] This is not to say that Marwa only cares about Black people. In other occasions, Marwa has made it clear that she is anti-colonial violence. She has also highlighted on numerous occasions that she is against the suffering of Black and Brown people. In this particular case, I am focusing on highlighting her hatred of Black oppression and thus her love for Blackness.

> **Marwa:** But during that time in South Florida, I think 92 Somalis were arrested by ICE in Minnesota and they were brought here to South Florida at the Krome detention center. Before they went to the Krome detention center from Minnesota, they were sent back on a deportation flight to Somalia. But something happened where the judge ordered the flight to come back. So they literally landed. And they came back, but they didn't take them back to Minnesota, they brought them back here to South Florida. And the newer lawyers at the University of Miami, the law clinic were basically kind of working with them. And a lot of them [Somalis] said that they were *chained* on the plane. And they were being called a lot of racial slurs like *nigger* and everything like that. I think one incident, one guy wanted to be unchained because he wanted to use the bathroom, and obviously, they said just piss in the bucket. This entire incident, I found on an Intercept article, and it was like literally getting no traffic at all because you know, they're Black African Muslims.

In this part of the story, there were two words where Marwa’s demeanor changed: when she said “chained” and “nigger.”

Marwa emphasized these two words. Both times, when she said “chained” and “nigger,” Marwa’s voice elevated, her body jolted forward, and once again her eyebrows lowered. As Marwa was speaking, I wrote in my notes: “it almost feels like something is brewing or festering in her, but it’s almost as if she is holding back or containing it. Clearly, she is upset” (Date: April 5, 2019). In Marwa’s story, two main issues enraged her.

First, she was enraged that Black African Muslims were “not being talked about at all.” Second, she was disgusted by the treatment of the Somalis who were arrested by ICE. It was love and rage that drove her, or rather, that activated her to reach out to BAJI: Black Alliance on Just Immigration. Together, Marwa and BAJI organized two protests and started a national petition that was signed by 10, 000 people. Marwa went on to tell me why she was so enraged:

> **Marwa:** And it's a big issue for me because of the erasure, specifically of Black Muslims. As if we don't experience Islamophobia or anti- Black racism. It was just very, very important. And it was just like a big thing. When that thing happened it was like, 'Oh, look, this is literally the epitome of erasure,' you know, not even talking about that. Literally being chained on a plane brought back imagery of neo-colonial plantations, of just chaining Black people and telling them to pee on themselves. It really just struck a chord with me.
>
> **Gerson:** That's a lot.
>
> **Marwa:** It is a lot. That's the thing, yea, it's a lot. But I'm just, like, it deserves more. The oppression is just so violent.

In this exchange, Marwa was expressing her rage regarding the oppression that plagues Black people. She was enraged that Black people were being erased from the national narrative and treated like slaves. Her love for Black African Muslims ensued into a state of rage which activated Marwa to organize protests and start a national petition.

Yes, both love and rage helped to activate Marwa. But love in particular, seems to also be an emotional framework through which Marwa comes to understand Blackness.[9] As Marwa stated, she understands anti-Blackness to be the medium through which the world is built upon. Sara Ahmed has pointed how at times forms of “anti-ness” can be understood as a linguistic expression of hatred.[10] Therefore, if the world is built on anti-Blackness, then we might say that the world understands Blackness through a prism of hatred. Marwa, following her Afro-pessimistic beliefs, suggests that the only way forward is “to destroy the world,” which means that her desire is to destroy hate and, thus, anti-Blackness. Since we can infer anti-Blackness to mean hatred, then, we can also infer that Blackness (sans anti) means love.

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[9] *Love* is a loaded term because of the multiple contexts in which it can be used (e.g., romantic love, parental love, etc.). But for the purposes of my analysis, love simply refers to the empathy, affinity, loyalty, or commitment towards ending injustice.

[10] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 123. In her analysis, Ahmed is discussing the way hate groups reappropriate the language of love and hate. Ahmed writes that as a result of such a reappropriation, “critics of hate groups become defined as those who hate, those who act out of a sense of ‘anti-ness’ or ‘against-ness’, and thus those who not only cannot protect the bodies of White Americans from crimes, but re-enact such crimes in the use of the language of hate.” I do not wish to get into the specifics of her argument. I simply wish to point out that the logic of “anti-ness” can be understood as an linguistic expression of hatred.

Destroying a world of anti-Blackness would mean destroying a world that is premised on anti-Black violence. And to create a world without “anti-Blackness,” but rather, with Blackness, would mean to create a world where Blackness is understood through a prism of love. As such, love is the emotion through which Marwa understands Blackness. It is love for Black people through which Marwa hopes the world can be built upon. Until that moment comes, anti-Blackness will continue to enrage Marwa because she loves Black people; her rage will activate her to continue fighting.

Before I continue, I do not want to suggest that love is simply a “good” emotion. As I have argued throughout this study, emotions can be employed for the purposes of good and evil. Despite her critiques of love as it relates to multicultural discourse, Ahmed does believe there is a place for love. For Ahmed, how one loves, matters. Love might come to matter, according to Ahmed, as a way to describe the affectionate solidarity that exists among those who work together to “create a different world.”[11] And it is love, both in the case of Cabba and Marwa, that creates a sense of solidarity between them and their respective communities.

I also do not wish to suggest that love and rage are essential traits of Blackness. As I have demonstrated, in the case of Marwa, Blackness is understood through a framework of love. Regarding “Black rage,” Bryan McCann argues that if “one did not love Blackness, then rage would have no basis."[12] Love informs an understanding of Black identity for Marwa. Marwa's love serves as a response to the incessant violence that targets Black people. This love fuels her rage, and in turn, propels her to act. The combination of love and rage might be most vivid in Marwa's blogs.

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[11] Ibid., 141.

Publishing Love and Rage

Marwa has published a few blogs on RaceBaitr. I will highlight quotes from two of her blogs to explore the connection between love and rage as it relates to the activist. In the first article, Marwa describes a situation where an Arab-American Muslim, Adam Saleh, was removed from an airline because he was speaking Arabic on the plane. Apparently, speaking Arabic frightened and angered White passengers, thus, he was removed from the flight. Marwa states that many "non-Black Muslims" came to Saleh's defense but were "nonchalant" when they discovered Saleh's "history of anti-Blackness."[13] Marwa wrote the following in her blog:

> Unlike many, my fury with this situation is not Saleh being kicked off the plane or even that his story was possibly a hoax. I am angered that this is yet another indication of the pervasive normalization of anti-Black sentiment within the American Muslim Arab community…The people who would have me convinced that we are "brothers and sisters in Islam" because we share the same language have participated in the most violent ways of normalizing anti-Black ideas…The position of the Black Muslim or Arab is a paradoxical one. How does she reconcile with the question of "solidarity" while both the Arab and Caucasian communities still continue to oppress and violate Blackness in every way? Simply put, we don't.

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[12] Bryan J. McCann, "Affect, Black Rage, and False Alternatives in the Hip-Hop Nation," *Cultural Studies—Critical Methodologies* 13, no. 5 (2013): 408-418, 411.

[13] Isra Ibrahim, "How the Response to Delta Airline's Islamophobia Normalizes Anti-Black Violence in Muslim Spaces," *RaceBaitr*, December 28, 2016. https://racebaitr.com/2016/12/28/response-delta-airlines-islamophobia-normalizes-anti-Black-violence-muslim-spaces/.

At times during our interviews and conversations, Marwa's rage was difficult to see. Despite its [rage] invisibility or obscurity, her rage still propelled her to act, organize, and gather signatures for a national petition. Marwa's rage was also palpable in the substance of her arguments. In this example, however, Marwa's rage was much more visible.

Marwa specifically refers to her emotion as one of "fury." What makes her furious is the continuous, "pervasive normalization," of anti-Blackness in the Muslim community. There is no doubt, Marwa is enraged. And it is her empathy, affinity, or what I am choosing to call *love* for Black people, that informs and motivates her rage. As such, I am proposing that if Marwa did not love Black people, if she did not have a strong affinity for Black people and the injustices that affect them, she would not be enraged. And without her rage, I surmise, she would not be as involved in activist endeavors.

Marwa and I spoke about other issues as well. For example, on October 7, 2019, I interviewed Marwa regarding immigration. In passing, Marwa mentioned that she sees herself claiming an immigrant political identity with "Brown and Black people." Throughout this interview she also spoke about the importance of Black and Brown political solidarity. But when Marwa spoke about the oppression that targets Black people, as I mentioned in the previous section, her energy and demeaner were different. There have been numerous situations where Brown people have been arrested and detained by ICE. However, Marwa did not mention that such horrible actions led her, or activated her, to organize protests or start a national petition.[14] Thus, I am suggesting that it is Marwa's love for Black people that activates her rage, particularly in moments of injustice. This is not to say that Marwa does not care or stand in solidarity with other groups of people. But rather, that Black people are the people who she loves.

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[14] This is not to say that Marwa did not organize protests or start a national petition to aid Brown people. However, she never mentioned organizing protests or starting a petition in regard to Brown people.

In her blog, Marwa critiqued the hypocrisy of those who purport to be in religious solidarity with her for their perpetual complicity in anti-Black violence. In response to this, Marwa proposed that Black Muslims and Arabs should not engage in solidarity with those who continue to oppress them. Cornel West has positioned Malcolm X as the archetype of what he calls, "Black rage." Malcolm X is the archetype because of his "great love for Black people."[15] By love, West is referring to Malcolm's "profound commitment to affirm Black humanity at any cost and his tremendous courage to accent the hypocrisy of American society."[16]

West goes on to say that Malcolm's love was not "abstract nor ephemeral…[instead] it was a concrete connection with a degraded and devalued people…"[17] It was the love for those who Malcolm understood to be "degraded and devalued" that drove his rage. As her blog came to a close, Marwa wrote:

> I am required to fight against Islamophobia not because I should have my labor at the service of non-Black Arabs, but because I understand that, exactly like any other White supremacist project, it is the Blackest of the Black who will suffer the most… It is only through the constant and conscious recentering of Blackness in culture and religion, through the understanding that Blackness is constantly under threat, that all people can find liberation.

Like Malcolm, Marwa's love reflects a connection with those who "suffer the most" under a regime of White supremacy: "the Blackest of the Black." Her rage, which is motivated by a love for Black people, propels (i.e., activates) Marwa to not only fight against Islamophobia, but also to politically organize, write blogs, and engage in other social justice endeavors.

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[15] Cornel West, *Race Matters,* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993), 136.
[16] Ibid., 136.
[17] Ibid., 136.

Summary

In this chapter I explored the connection between two emotions. These emotions are sequential: love and rage. I have proposed that anger operates differently than rage. Following Lyman, rage acts as a response when an appeal for justice is denied. However, in a culture of activism, the etiology of rage is love. That is, in order to be activated by rage, one must love. I utilized the example of Dragon Ball Z to begin my analysis between the connection of love and rage. In the case of Cabba, he did not transform into a Super Saiyan, that is, activated, until his loved ones were threatened. The threat of losing his family and universe enraged Cabba, propelling him to fight and achieve the Super Saiyan transformation. Through the use of DBZ, I outlined my initial thoughts regarding love and rage. This outline set the groundwork for my analysis of Marwa.

Marwa's rage had various manifestations. First, Marwa displayed a type of invisible rage. Marwa did not elevate her voice or clench her firsts; she laid against the library wall in a slouched, almost relaxed, manner. Marwa's rage lied in the substance of her argument. And yet, this invisible rage still drove her to organize protests and start a national petition. For Marwa, the world is predicated on anti-Black violence, as such, it must be overthrown and destroyed. Like Cabba, love also motivates Marwa's rage.

Love is an emotion that structures Marwa's understanding of Blackness, thus, fueling her rage. Unlike our interviews, Marwa's rage was more apparent in her blogs. Her blogs became a space where Marwa could more fully articulate her fury. In fact, it was her rage that activated her to publish her rage in the first place. Thus, not only do we see her activation through rage, but we also see how her own rage can lead to the possible activation of others through her publication. In the chapter that follows, I explore this relationship, that of publishing and activation, through a social media endeavor I call, WokeWednesdays.

CHAPTER NINE

WOKEWEDNESDAYS: AN ATTEMPT TO ACTIVATE

Facebook is currently the largest social media platform in the world with 2.4 billion users.[1] In 2012, Facebook expanded its reach when it purchased Instagram. When it was first acquired, Instagram users amounted to 30 million.[2] Presently, Instagram (IG) has over 1 billion users. Writ large, social media has changed the way we interact with friends, family, and even engage in political activism. My focus in this chapter is to explore some of the governmental aspects of online activism. I will draw from autoethnographic data, using the social justice Instagram page and show I created (WokeWednesdays) as the focus of analysis. Not only do I examine the ways in which I govern myself, but also the ways I have attempted to shape the conduct of those following the page. Additionally, through personal reflection I examine the neoliberal dimensions of my work.

First, I begin by defining what entails "social media," as there seems to be some confusion regarding the subject. Second, I address the critiques regarding social media activism. Third, I explain what led me to create WokeWednesdays, or rather, what activated me to begin this social justice endeavor. Fourth, I explore the governmental aspects of WokeWednesdays. Next, I describe the seductive nature of neoliberalism as it relates to social media activism. Subsequently, I propose that while social media is a viable activist tool, there are also limitations. I conclude the chapter by suggesting that social media activism might be one of the ways we engage in parrhesia. I will begin my analysis by describing my understanding of social media.

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[1] Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, "The Rise of Social Media," *Our World in Data*, *Global Change Data Lab*, September 18, 2019, https://ourworldindata.org/rise-of-social-media.

[2] Eveyln M. Rusli, "Facebook Buys Instagram for $1 Billion," *New York Times*, April 9, 2012, https://dealbook.nytimes.com/2012/04/09/facebook-buys-instagram-for-1-billion/?mtrref=undefined&assetType=REGIWALL.

Social Media and Activism

I was recently having a conversation with a professor about social media and activism.[3] As we delved into the conversation, I realized that perhaps the professor had a different understanding of "social media" than I did. For the professor, it seemed that social media entailed three sites/applications: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. For me, social media encompassed a lot more than that. How could a term that is used so often be understood so differently?

According to Google Dictionary, social media refers to "websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking." From this definition, we can understand social media to be more expansive. Yes, the aforementioned applications/websites are components of social media, but so are YouTube, Zoom, Snapchat, TikTok, dating applications (Tinder, Grinder, Bumble, etc.), and any other technological, democratic medium. Understanding social media as a capacious space has opened room for political imagination. As Paolo Gerbaudo points out, social media has shaped the way we coalesce for change and "choreograph collective action."[4]

In his discussion of participatory democracy, Benjamin Baez proposed that it could be likely that "the traditional political field has been opened up, recouched in terms of the social, and as such opened up to all kinds of individuals, identities, claims, and activities."[5] Instagram and social media writ large, can be understood as socio-political spaces that allow users, whether on the right, middle, or left, to participate democratically. I, however, have a unique entry point into this democratic, social media space.

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[3] A previous version of this chapter was presented at the American Educational Studies Association in November 2019.

[4] Paolo Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism* (London: Pluto Press, 2012), 4.

I am the founder and administrator of a social justice IG page that has over 40 thousand followers: WokeWednesdays. Gerbaudo states that influential social media administrators have a way of becoming "'soft leaders' or choreographers, involved in setting the scene and constructing an emotional space within which collective action can unfold."[6] I draw from personal experiences with WokeWednesdays to see what we might learn about social media activism. There are those, however, who critique social media activism.

Critiques of Social Media Activism

There are some who do not believe social media is effective for social change. President Obama recently said at the 2019 Obama Foundation Summit:

> but I do get a sense sometimes now, among certain young people, and this accelerated by social media, there is this sense sometimes that the way of me making change is to be as judgmental as possible about other people and that's enough, like if I tweet or hashtag about how you didn't do something right… or use the wrong verb, then I can sit back and feel pretty good about myself because man, you see how woke I was, I called you out…you know, that's not activism, that's not bringing about change.[7] (Guardian News, YouTube).

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[5] Benjamin Baez, "Democracy" in Keywords in *Youth Studies: Tracing Affects, Movement, Knowledges*, eds. Nancy Lesko and Susan Talburt (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 155.

[6] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, 5.

[7] Guardian News, "Barack Obama Takes on 'Woke' Call Out Culture: That's Not Activism," YouTube, October 30, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaHLd8de6nM.

President Obama seems to have been describing what some scholars are calling "slacktivism," a term that describes the "disconnect between awareness and action through the use of social media."[8]

Nolan Cabrera, Cheryl Matias, and Roberto Montoya have described slacktivism as "self-aggrandizing, politically ineffective activism."[9] Critiquing the use of Twitter and Facebook, Gladwell wrote:

> we seem to have forgotten what activism is…Facebook activism succeeds not by motivating people to make a real sacrifice but by motivating them to do the things that people do when they are not motivated enough to make a real sacrifice.[10]

Embedded in these critiques, is a concern with the "real." That some forms of activism are more "real" than other forms of activism. This logic reduces social media activism to the level of imposter. But what does it mean for some forms of activism to be real or fake?

In her work regarding pornography, Catharine MacKinnon seems to also be concerned with the "real." MacKinnon is interested in the legal justifications of sexual abuse in pornography. Since pornography is protected under the first amendment, pornography presumably falls under the legal classification of "speech." When cases of abused women are actually heard, legally, they are treated as defamation, not discrimination. Abuse against women, via pornography, is thus understood in terms of "what it says…rather than in terms of what it does."[11] In this way, pornographic films and pictures are not considered reality per se, but as ideas and forms of communication. Because pornography is not considered *real* sex, it fails to be recognized as *real* abuse.

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[8] Cerise L. Glenn, "Activism or 'Slacktivism?': Digital Media and Organizing for Social Change," *Communication Teacher* 29, no. 2 (2015): 81.

[9] Nolan L. Cabrera, Cheryl E. Matias, and Roberto Montoya, "Activism or Slacktivism? The Potential Pitfalls of Social Media in Contemporary Student Activism," *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 10, no. 4 (2017): 400.

[10] Malcolm Gladwell, "Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted," *New Yorker*, September 27, 2010, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/04/small-change-malcolm-gladwell?irclickid=xJ1TzkUR5xyOTNlwUx0Mo3YXUki2W40Vr2XIzc0&irgwc=1&source=affiliate_impactpmx_12f6tote_desktop_adgoal%20GmbH&utm_source=impact-affiliate&utm_medium=123201&utm_campaign=impact&utm_content=Online%20Tracking%20Link&utm_brand=tny.

MacKinnon argues that pornography is masturbation material. It is not the ideas or the abstractions of pornography that cause men to come, but pornography itself. Pornography, through pictures, words, and film, create a "physical reality for sexual use."[12] Through the medium of media, pornography activates the individual to act, to have an erection, and to ejaculate. Via a media of the social, the individual is activated by what they see, hear, and experience. Following MacKinnon, I argue that social media activism, an amalgamation of videos, texts, and pictures, must be understood in active, not passive terms. Social media activism is real because of what it produces, for how it makes us feel, for what it might erect or activate people to do.

Take, for example, right wing activists. Various scholars have studied what they term the "dark side" of the internet.[13] For decades, the internet has served as a medium to increase not only domestic, but also global solidarity among extremists.[14] Through the use of YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and other websites, multifarious organizations recruit, organize, empower, and mobilize White extremists.[15] There is nothing not *real* about such violent movements.

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[11] Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Only Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 11.

[12] Ibid., 24.

[13] Manuela Caiani and Linda Parenti, "The Dark Side of the Web: Italian Right-Wing Extremist Groups and the Internet," *South European Society and Politics* 14, no. 3 (2009): 273. See also, Mattias Ekman, "The Dark Side of Online Activism: Swedish Right-Wing Extremist Video Activism on YouTube," *Journal of Media and Communication Research* 30, no. 56 (2014): 79.

[14] Val Burris, Emery Smith, and Ann Strahm, "White Supremacist Networks on the Internet," *Sociological Focus* 33, no. 2 (2000): 232.

Focusing on narrow conceptualizations of what activism is or can be, forecloses imagination and inhibits spontaneity. Activism is not rigid or static. Activism is active, it activates; it can take any form the contexts, times, or spaces require. Instead of precluding possibilities, this study embraces a multiplicity of activisms. However, my concern in this chapter (and study) is not with the "effectiveness," "usefulness," or to put it in research terms, "validity," of social media activism.

Verifying if social media activism "works" or not, distracts and limits ways of being, which inevitably also ignores the multifarious ways that individuals can be activated, whether for good or evil. Susan Talburt argues that focusing on the notion of "usefulness" forces researchers to "verify a 'real' and thus limits open speculation, the depiction of uncertainty, and the creation of new concepts."[16] In this chapter I focus on what social media produces and may make possible. I now turn to WokeWednesdays.

Why WokeWednesdays?

I got on Instagram one night and noticed that my friend was on IG Live---the Live feature allows the user to stream live videos and interact with followers in real-time (followers can type questions and the user can see the questions live on their screen). My friend was taking questions regarding social issues, specifically questions relating to race and racism. Thinking it was a cool idea, I became curious about doing something similar, that is, I became activated. After checking my schedule, Wednesdays at 9:00 pm seemed to be the best time to host a show. I quickly thought of a catchy name. “Woke,” seemed to be a popular word at the time (“woke” is slang for being aware of social issues); I came up with *WokeWednesdays*.

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[15] Caiani and Parenti, "The Dark Side of the Web," 274; See also Ekman, "The Dark Side of Online Activism," 80; see also Josh Adams and Vincent J. Roscigno, "White Supremacists, Oppositional Culture and the World Wide Web," *Social Forces* 84, no. 2 (2005): 763.

[16] Susan Talburt, *Subject to Identity: Knowledge, Sexuality, and Academic Practices in Higher Education* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 2000), 83.

I promoted the show through the Instagram Story feature (a fifteen-second video that is posted for twenty-four hours before disappearing). I had been reading Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's work on colorblind racism so I decided to speak about race and racism the first night of the show. For Michel Foucault, part of knowing the self requires examining the self, which he termed askesis. One aspect of askesis is an exercise in which the “subject puts himself in a situation in which he can verify whether he can confront events and use the discourses with which he is armed.”[17] Putting myself in this position, disclosing my ideas, taking questions, and opening myself up for critique, tested my knowledge and also served as a means for examining the self.

Initially, only two people logged on to see me speak: my brother and sister. But as the night progressed, more people tuned in. That night I made the argument that people of color could not be racist because they did not have any power. I was pretty confident in my argument, after all, I was a second-semester doctoral student. However, one of my friends challenged the argument. They said that people of color can be racist because they have power in certain situations. I was unsure of how to respond, I had not been challenged like that before. I told my friend that I would do some research and come back the following week with a more informed answer. I ended the show by providing my followers with reading tips. I recommended a book called "How To Read A Book." I told followers to circle words when they did not understand them and to make their own personal dictionaries. I also suggested they read out loud because that helps slow the reader down when reading. I even shared my favorite online dictionary website and YouTube links that I find helpful. From the outset of WokeWednesdays, I was attempting to shape behaviors and educational commitments.

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[17] Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 16-49, 35.

The first night of the show, I ended at 11 pm; a friend called immediately afterward. She mentioned how much she enjoyed the show and encouraged me to start a separate Instagram page from my own, a page that would be dedicated to social justice endeavors. Since I wanted to keep my "personal" life separate from my "activist" life, I thought this would be a good move. Being constituted as a subject, for Huck Gutman, means dividing the self. Speaking about Rousseau, Gutman argues that by "dividing himself from the world, he creates a self, he constitutes himself as a subject of knowledge and examination."[18] By creating a WokeWednesdays account, separate from my personal Instagram account, I constituted a self, a subject of knowledge warranting constant analysis. That night, WokeWednesdays became more than just a weekly show that aired at 9:00 pm, it became an Instagram page. My friend created a flyer for the page; a new self was brought into existence.

WokeWednesdays has been active for over three years now. As it pertains to the show, each week I invite different co-hosts for a one-two hour episode on IG Live where we address issues regarding race, class, gender, sexuality, capitalism, and other issues pertaining to oppression. Typically, I reach out to guests a few weeks in advance, but sometimes it is last minute due to conflicting schedules. I do require that guests be knowledgeable and informed on the issues being discussed. Unlike many podcasts that are pre-recorded and only audio, WokeWednesdays is unique because of the live feature. The live feature permits audio and visual. The show is done in real-time and audience members can submit comments, questions, or disagreements on screen. I have also created a YouTube page where I upload past episodes in case someone misses the live episode or would like to view prior episodes.

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[18] Huck Gutman, "Rousseau's Confession: A Technology of the Self," in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 99-120, 107.

WokeWednesdays serves other purposes in addition to the show. Community organizing, for example, is a focus of the page. Activist organizations around the country ask me to share flyers and information regarding political events, meeting times, and places to organize. Sharing this information helps individuals connect with activists in their area and vice versa. Another integral component of the page are the quotidian posts. On average, I post two to five times a day. Posts can be pictures, memes, tweets, videos, quotes, and so forth.

Most posts explicitly address political issues, such as the dominant ideologies of: White supremacy, heteronormativity, patriarchy, and so forth. Posts may be informative, funny, or encouraging. Recently, I even posted a video of one of my favorite political salsa artists. Regardless of the post, the aim is always political; each post is intended to accomplish something: educate, create awareness, or empower.

As Barbera Cruikshank reminds us that answers concerning political problems are not found in any particular form of government, but only in more politics.[19] Administering this page is one way I enter the realm of the political. Instagram serves as a platform that I use to govern not only myself but the population that comprises WokeWednesdays. In the section that follows I outline what I mean by government.

Governmentality and Instagram

A governmental analysis is concerned with the shaping of conduct. Baez defined government as "the ways in which the conduct of individuals and institutions is problematized and made the end of techniques seeking to direct that conduct in particular directions and for particular purposes."[20] This definition implies that conduct is not necessarily shaped by techniques, but nevertheless, that an attempt is made at shaping and regulating behavior. Baez continues to say that government or governmentality becomes governmental when it becomes "technical…[and] when there are in it justifications for interventions into people's lives."[21] Everything that comprises WokeWednesdays (i.e., the show, the posts, the IG stories, and the quotidian arguments I put forth) are intentional, and also, laborious attempts at intervening in the everyday lives of individuals in hopes of shaping their conduct, commitments, values, and political obligations.

By laborious I mean the numerous hours I spend reaching out to new guests every week; the hours I spend preparing for the show; the research I do to make sure posts are credible and factual; reading and answering comments and direct messages; blocking those who leave xenophobic comments; the time I spend with guests before, after, and during the show; the driving required to meet with guests; the money I spend on snacks for the show, accessories like cameras, lighting, and microphones, all while on a graduate assistant salary of $21, 789. Like any activist will tell you, this is not easy. Attempts at governing, specifically in relation to activism, can be tiresome, exhausting, emotionally taxing, and yet, most attempts at governing fail.[22]

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[19] Barbara Cruikshank, *The Will To Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 2.

[20] Benjamin Baez, *Technologies of Government: Politics and Power in the "Information Age"* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2014), 7.

[21] Ibid., 7.

As such, there seems to be a cruel optimist connection between government and activism. Lauren Berlant describes "cruel optimism" as a "relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility."[23] As an activist endeavor, WokeWednesdays is inherently attached to the possibility of a better world and to a compromised imagined future—a future that often feels out of reach and yet is always being sought after. WokeWednesdays represents a precarious and cruelly optimistic attempt to activate. On Instagram, nevertheless, individuals are free to follow any page they would like. We may say that Instagram (and other social media platforms that thrive on the idea of "followers") constitutes a *liberal space*. As Doreen Massey argues, space, as opposed to place, comes as a result of interrelations "constituted through interactions."[24]

On Instagram, spaces are created through the interactions of the host account and the followers. By liberal, I mean that the attempts to govern, that is, the efforts to shape the actions of IG followers presupposes autonomous individuals who are free to follow, comment, and share the WokeWednesdays page. Unlike private pages where followers have to be accepted upon request, WokeWednesdays is public. This is part of what makes the page democratic; it is open to anyone. Any person with internet access can view the page, comment on posts, the show, and send direct messages (DM) to the administrator, me.

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[22] Ulrich Brockling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke, "An Introduction," in *Governmentality: Current Issues and Future Challenges*, eds. Ulrich Brockling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 1-33, 11.
[23] Lauren Berlant, "Cruel Optimism," *A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 17, no. 3 (2006): 21.
[24] Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London, England: Sage Publications, 2005), 9.

Additionally, a governmental approach assumes the possibility that the governed, in this case, Instagram users, are able to change their behavior, thus, encompassing the ability to act and think differently.[25] Differently said, Instagram users can be activated or oriented to engage further in politics concerning oppression. Posts (e.g., videos, tweets, memes, event flyers, etc.), captions, hashtags, IG stories, and IG Lives, are directed at shaping the conduct, attitudes, and behaviors of followers in hopes that users will be motivated to think and act differently; better yet, be activated.

A governmental analysis is also concerned with the production of truth. Mitchell Dean suggests that “we govern others and ourselves according to what we take to be true about who we are, what aspects of our existence should be worked upon, how, with what means and to what ends.”[26] Dean is denoting a relationship with the self. Foucault understood subjectivity, or technologies of the self, to be the “relationship of self to self, the exercise of self on self, and the truth that the individual may discover deep within himself.”[27] These techniques allow for the self to be known, understood, and produced.[28]

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[25] Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999), 15.
[26] Ibid., 18.
[27] Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the College de France 1979 – 1980 and Oedipal Knowledge*, trans. Graham Burchell, eds. Michel Senellart, Francois Ewald, Alessandro Fontana, and Arnold I. Davidson (New York, NY: Picador, 2012/2014), 128.
[28] Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” 20.

The self, then, does not preexist discourse. According to Foucault, the self is a narration; something that is written and articulated.[29] Social media, specifically Instagram, is a way of producing, narrating, and making the self knowable. The self, being something that is "fetishized, the object of desire which is wished into being."[30] As such, the self is constituted through the multifarious posting mechanisms allotted by Instagram.

However, as Judith Butler notes, within a culture of cupidity, subversion and resistance carry "market value."[31] In this way, political efforts such as activism are at constant risk of being co-opted by neoliberal tactics. WokeWednesdays also exemplifies how economic rationality seeks to seduce activist endeavors. In the section that follows, I begin with a description of neoliberalism. Doing so will allow me to explain how WokeWednesdays, was, and continues to be, a target of neoliberal governmentality.

Neoliberalism, Seducing Activism

Thomas Lemke notes that within the context of neoliberalism, economic logic permeates social life.[32] Foucault argued that neoliberal logic targets the individual to be the man of "enterprise and production."[33] Since economic logic becomes the framework through which individuals govern their life, individuals search for ways to maximize their human capital.[34] Human capital refers to the "investments" individuals make in themselves, such as going to college, taking part in working trainings and self-help practices, for the purposes of increasing their skills and knowledge, thus, positively affecting future income.[35] However, neoliberal attempts at governing are "not totalizing;" they are constantly being contested.[36] In this section, I hope to show some of the ways I have been the target of neoliberal rationalities, and also some of the ways I have challenged such governmental attempts.

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[29] Ibid., 27.

[30] Gutman, "Rousseau's Confession," 113.

[31] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), xxiii.

[32] Thomas Lemke, "'The Birth of Bio-Politics:' Michel Foucault's Lecture at the College de France on Neoliberal Governmentality," *Economy and Society* 30, no. 2 (2001): 190-207, 197.

[33] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1978 – 1979,* trans. Graham Burchell, eds. Michel Senellart, Francois Ewald, Alessandro Fontana, and Arnold I. Davidson (New York, NY: Picador, 2004/2008), 147.

[34] Benjamin Baez and Gerson Sanchez, "Neoliberalism in Higher Education: Reflections on Affirmative Action," *Thresholds* 40, no. 1 (2017): 40-53, 42.

The night I created the WokeWednesdays IG page, I created a separate account from my personal one. When I started the page, Instagram asked me to pick between a "personal" or "business" account; I chose the business account. This option provides the user with more analytical tools and features than a personal account. Once I created a username and password, I had to upload a profile picture (I picked the show's flyer as the first profile picture for the page). I was careful to pick an appealing IG handle (username) and profile picture since I wanted to attract followers.

In the world of Instagram and social media, followers are important because as one website puts it, a large platform can help inspire change, create more awareness, earn money, market a product with ease, and gain fame.[37] David Harvey notes that within a neoliberal regime, "individual success or failure are interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings."[38] On Instagram, success is understood in relation to having numerous followers; the more followers one has, the more successful one is. The desire for branding myself in particular ways; wanting to gain followers; and creating an attractive self, was still tied to social justice endeavors, yet, neoliberal rationalities were starting to creep in.

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[35] Ibid., 42-43; See also Gary Becker, "The Economic Way of Looking at Life," *Economic Sciences* (December 9, 1992): 38-58, 39.
[36] Soo Ahh Kwon, *Uncivil Youth: Race, Activism, and Affirmative Governmentality*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 6.
[37] Prajapati, Vinay. "Top Benefits of Instagram Followers for a Brand or Personality," *Tech Prevue,* April 14, 2020, https://www.techprevue.com/importance-of-instagram-followers/.
[38] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 65.

In the midst of the Las Vegas massacre, I became more attentive to the ways I react to Instagram views and likes. On October 1st, 2017, a terrorist opened fire at a Las Vegas crowd, murdering 58 people and wounding hundreds more. I remember waking up around five in the morning on October 2nd; I put on my glasses, and like the good millennial that I am, the first thing I did was check Instagram. After learning about the terrorist attack, I began to repost videos and news regarding the attack. I wanted to bring awareness to the horrific attack that had just taken place. I noticed the videos I was posting were picking up traction. Views and likes were coming in at a faster rate than usual. I remember feeling excited and happy that *my* posts were getting a lot of views and likes. But simultaneously, I also felt disgusted with myself. Why was I happy about the views and likes my posts were receiving?

I learned that posting during a tragedy meant more likes, reshares, and thus, more followers. In a way, I could not let this “tragedy go to waste,” so I kept posting. I was emotionally consuming the likes and views. In fact, they made me feel emotionally full, at least for a moment. Foucault argued that the

> man of consumption, insofar as he consumes, is a producer…he produces his own satisfaction. We should think of consumption as an enterprise activity by which the individual, precisely on the basis of the capital he has at his disposal, will produce something that will be his own satisfaction.[39]

I was producing my own satisfaction through the capital at my disposal. By capital, I do not mean money necessarily, but rather, social capital: the potential resources that are linked to possession of a network.[40] WokeWednesdays is a type of social capital, a network that I was putting to work in order to produce my own happiness. Wendy Brown argues that "networking" is a byproduct of market logic that spreads into new spheres, Instagram being an example of that.[41] Since the Las Vegas massacre, more tragedies have occurred, and each time that happens, I increase my platform. I get more followers, thus, becoming more satisfied.

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[39] Foucault, *The Birth of Bio-Politics*, 226.

Within a neoliberal milieu, IG users are also reduced to human capital. As Foucault elaborates, the human individual becomes the bearer of human capital.[42] Aaron Kuntz argues further that neoliberal rationalities emphasize a "virtualized body contained by virtualized spaces."[43] Instagram is an example of a virtualized space, comprised of virtualized bodies understood as "followers." These followers are converted into human capital, influencing my future income. The more followers I get, the more "successful" the page becomes, making WokeWednesdays (more) economically valuable. Followers, then, play a role in increasing potential opportunities for income.

Since July 25th, 2019, for example, I have received numerous recruitment e-mails from Amazon concerning their "Influencer Program." The number of followers and "other engagement metrics of your social media presence" determines qualification for the program. According to Amazon, the

> Amazon Influencer Program gives you a personal storefront on Amazon that you can customize and curate with products you love and recommend. You'll get a custom vanity URL (i.e. amazon.com/shop/yourhandle), to easily direct your fans.

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[40] Bourdieu, Pierre, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John Richardson (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986), 17-29, 21.
[41] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2015), 37.
[42] Foucault, *The Birth of Bio-Politics*, 226.
[43] Aaron Kuntz, *The Responsible Methodologist* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 38-39.

> When followers visit your page and shop on Amazon, you'll earn money from those purchases!

Followers, or human capital, are what qualifies WokeWednesdays as an influencer page, providing me with potential economic opportunities. As Amazon let me know, they reached out because this program was "built specifically for social media influencers…[making me a] great fit!"

I too, however, am human capital. Brown notes that we are "human capital not just for ourselves, but also for the firm, state, or postnational constellation of which we are members."[44] Attracting IG users through WokeWednesdays inevitably makes IG more popular, increasing their own influence. WokeWednesdays, despite its positive political aims, continues to be a target of neoliberal rationale, from its inception to present day.

Most recently, for example, I was sent a message by a "contractor" at the University of North Florida. They mentioned that they followed WokeWednesdays and loved the work I was doing. They passed my information to the Specialist of the Intercultural Center for Peace & Student Alliance for Inclusion and Diversity. The department was looking for a keynote speaker for its Hispanic Heritage Kickoff event. Because of WokeWednesdays, according to their e-mail, "it would be a great idea to highlight an influential person that is able to connect with today's students." I am not sure that they would consider me to be influential without WokeWednesdays and its numerous followers.

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[44] Brown, *Undoing the Demos,* 37.

Nevertheless, they reached out and are paying me to give a 10-15 minute speech about what it means to be Latino and about why I started WokeWednesdays. I am not against this, in fact, I want to do this and am looking forward to the event. But my desire and eagerness are connected to my political work. But my political work is tied to WokeWednesdays and its followers, and because of the followers, I am deemed as "influential." Neoliberalism acts almost like a web that connects my desires with economic rationalism. Not only, then, does Neoliberalism trap me, but it also seduces me through what I love to do.

However, it is important to note, that at the time of creating WokeWednesdays, I was not thinking about neoliberalism. In fact, I had no idea what neoliberalism was. I did not know I was a target of neoliberal governmentality; I was just trying to create a social justice page for the purposes of educating, helping, and building community. Nevertheless, this did not stop neoliberal rationalities from clawing their hooks into me, as dominant ideologies often have a way of doing. It was not until I started writing this chapter that I truly and critically began to analyze WokeWednesdays and Instagram through a neoliberal, governmental framework.

Writing this chapter, then, might entail what Foucault called, "care of the self." Foucault argued that part of knowing the self is caring for the self through a variety of activities (e.g., reflection, writing, reading).[45] In other words, it took a type of education (i.e., incessant reading about governmentality and neoliberalism; numerous classes; conversations with my professors; listening to YouTube lectures) and critical reflection to analyze and realize how deeply embedded I am in neoliberal rationalities, specifically as it pertains to social media activism. By educating the self, one cares for the self. We may argue, then, that such educational activities are subversive acts, especially within a context of neoliberalism.

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[45] Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," 27.

But neoliberalism must not only be understood by its dominating effects.[46] Solely focusing on its dominating aspects obscures other dimensions of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism contains aspects of domination (i.e., restricting freedom) and liberation (i.e., promoting freedom).[47] On one occasion, for example, a teenager messaged me after a WokeWednesdays episode. That night on the show we addressed immigration and various resources that can help those deemed as undocumented. The young teenager stated that she worked at a Mexican bakery and that ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) called their store, searching for undocumented people. Through WokeWednesdays we were able to put her in contact with activists in the area who could help. This is only one of the many ways WokeWednesdays continues to help in the community. However, Instagram does have its limits.

Some Limitations of Social Media Activism

As I have been suggesting, social media is a powerful tool that can be used for political purposes. This is not to say that Instagram does not have limitations. Foucault's concept of biopower might help us highlight some of the limitations of online political activism. Following Foucault, biopower (or biopolitics) is concerned with the care, administration, and health of a population.[48] A population can be understood as an amalgamation of living beings who are made knowable through various instruments such as statistics.[49] Instagram users may be understood as members of a population, who are not only known through statistics, but also by what they post on their respective accounts. Because biopolitics is concerned with security, each member of the population must abide by certain regulations, if the population is to be healthy as a whole.[50]

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[46] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 76.
[47] Baez and Sanchez, "Neoliberalism in Higher Education," 43.
[48] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 137.

In efforts to properly administer its population, Instagram has outlined a set of "Community Guidelines" (CG). The following is stated on their website:

> We want Instagram to continue to be an authentic and safe place for inspiration and expression. Help us foster this community. Post only your own photos and videos and always follow the law…We created the Community Guidelines so you can help us foster and protect this amazing community. By using Instagram, you agree to these guidelines and our Terms of Use. We're committed to these guidelines and we hope you are too. Overstepping these boundaries may result in deleted content, disabled accounts, or other restrictions.[51]

In liberal spaces, according to Nikolas Rose, governing through community entails that individuals voluntarily accept authority.[52] Foucault adds that power utilizes a variety of techniques in order to entice, seduce, and encourage members of the population to act in particular ways in efforts to protect their community and/or population.[53]

For example, the Community Guidelines state that they (Instagram) want to "continue" to be "authentic" and "safe" for the purposes of expression and inspiration. Notice that the Community Guidelines do not say "We want to be an authentic and safe place." This would imply that in the past, IG has not been "authentic" or "safe." By adding "continue" to the statement, IG asserts that authenticity and safety are *natural* characteristics and, thus, essential elements of their population. It seems that without authenticity or safety, inspiration and expression cannot occur. As such, the use of, "continue," serves as a warning to limit and diminish the uncertainty of potential threats from the future, for the purposes of security. In the subsequent sentence, IG extends an invitation to users, making it clear that they want the willing participation of its members to nurture its community. The community cannot be a safe place without the contribution of its members. To avoid confusion, IG explicitly states that *only* your own photos and videos should be posted. One should not post anyone else's content, it must be *your own*.

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[49] Dean, *Governmentality*, 107; See also Baez, *Technologies of Government*, 13-14.

[50] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977 – 1978*, trans. Graham Burchell, eds. Michel Senellart, Francois Ewald, Alessandro Fontana, and Arnold I. Davidson (New York, NY: Picador, 2004/2007), 47.

[51] Instagram, *Help Center – Privacy and Safety Center*, https://help.instagram.com/477434105621119/?helpref=hc_fnav&bc[0]=Instagram%20Help&bc[1]=Privacy%20and%20Safety%20Center.

[52] Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 176-187.

[53] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 777-795, 789.

If you have ever been to an airport, you know that you must not let your luggage out of your sight. Taking this precaution diminishes the threat of having your luggage tampered with or stolen. In this way, everyone in the airport is positioned as a potential threat, as those who can vandalize your luggage at any moment. Everyone, except Transportation Security Administration (TSA), in other words, the state. The state, or TSA, is positioned as trustworthy, because after all, their core values are integrity, respect, and commitment, as is stated on their website.[54] Travelers are deemed as dangerous deviants, meanwhile, the state is positioned as agents emblematic of safety or security. Similarly, by discouraging individuals from posting the content of others, Instagram insinuates that *others* are potential threats. If you do not want your page tampered with, only post your content. Instagram, like the airport, deems the law as the arbiter of security, as a regulatory apparatus. As Foucault notes, the law is able to operate increasingly as a norm because it is incorporated into numerous apparatuses (e.g., the airport and social media).[55]

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[54] Transportation Security Administration, Mission Statement, https://www.tsa.gov/about/tsa-mission

Next, Instagram indicates that guidelines exist so *you* can help *us* foster and protect. Once again, IG reiterates that it is on the individual to keep their population safe. Because Instagram may be understood as a liberal space, we may say that IG depends on the capacity of "prudential" users, thus, empowering them to act responsibly.[56] If the user wants to take part in a space where they can have fun, network, build financial opportunities, or engage in activist work, they must take it upon *themselves* to secure their space. The purpose of empowerment, Cruikshank points out, is to "act upon another's interests and desires in order to conduct their actions toward an appropriate end."[57] Following Cruikshank, we could argue that part of what it means to be a good Instagram citizen entails: abiding by the rules, posting your own content, and reporting those who disobey the guidelines.

Recently, Instagram displayed its purported commitment to these guidelines by temporarily banning celebrity and rapper, Tory Lanez. In the midst of the Covid-19 quarantine, Tory Lanez began to host Quarantine Radio through IG Live. Because of nudity, the rapper was temporarily banned. Recently, the "Head" of Instagram, Adam Mosseri, was interviewed by the CEO of The Shade Room, Angelica Nwandu. When asked why Lanez was banned, Mosseri responded with:

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[55] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 144.
[56] See Dean, *Governmentality*, 123.
[57] Cruikshank, *The Will to Empower*, 69.

> Quarantine Radio is great, so first, shout out to Tory Lanez on that. Quarantine Radio is not banned. The [IG] lives have been great, the lives with the fans have been great, but you can't have nudity on Instagram. It's part of our community guidelines, it's part of the rules and we can't make exceptions…we have to stick to the rules, otherwise, why do we have them? But generally, big fan of Tory Lanez, big fan of Quarantine Radio and I hope it comes back soon.[58]

Cruikshank notes that liberal democratic governments work best when it works through, rather, than against, its citizens.[59] We see here that Mosseri begins by praising and empowering Lanez in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic (apparently, he seems to be a fan). However, he also states that rules are to be followed and no exceptions can be made. Then, Mosseri quickly reverts to encouraging Lanez to come back soon. Mosseri seems to be trying to work with Lanez, attempting to get Lanez to govern himself to limit future intervention. Temporarily banning Lanez, however, also sends a message to the rest of the IG population: that they too should follow the guidelines. To avoid having their accounts disabled, the IG population must govern themselves appropriately. By taking these steps, IG hopes to ensure the safety of the population.

But if celebrities like Tory Lanez are susceptible to the constraints of IG, so is WokeWednesdays. Within the first year of WokeWednesdays, I received a notification. The notification stated that one of my posts had been reported because it did not follow the Community Guidelines. As “good citizens” of the IG population, someone or some people took it upon themselves to report a post they did not agree with. The post was a picture of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. In the post, the three brown bears were being arrested, meanwhile, Goldilocks was just chillen, absolved from her vandalism. In a clever way, the post utilized a seemingly innocuous children's fairytale to highlight police brutality, racial profiling, and White privilege.

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[58] HoodzoneProductions, *CEO of Instagram Tells Shade Room Why Tory Lanez Got Banned*, April 8, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUUQgNq8kVs.
[59] Cruikshank, *The Will to Empower*, 81.

After the post was reported, not only were other posts receiving fewer likes, but WokeWednesdays was also losing followers. To be clear, WokeWednesdays page had not been banned or deleted, only the Goldilocks post. After doing some research, I learned about something called a "shadowban." According to Instagram, there is no such thing as a shadowban. Yet, there a numerous web pages addressing this phenomenon. Shadowbanning entails losing followers, lack of engagement with posts, and posts not showing up in hashtags.[60] In the midst of this research, I learned that other accounts were also shadowbanned. I also learned about different ways that could possibly fix my account. After numerous tries, WokeWednesdays began to work properly again. Since then, I have been shadowbanned many times.

Because Instagram is owned by Facebook, it utilizes similar algorithms to power the feed.[61] Through numbers, calculations, and statistics Instagram makes posts knowable or not knowable to its users. Cathy O'Neil notes that Facebook decides based on their own interests, what will be conveyed and seen on its social network.[62] By reporting a post, Instagram is made aware that a member of the population is disruptive, in other words, dangerous. Consequently, reporting affects algorithms, which leads to shadowbanning, thus, constraining online political activism. Shadowbanning, as a governmental technology, seeks to shape behavior, affecting how and what users post on their page. Because shadowbanning is not "real" according to Instagram, it serves as an invisible threat for purposes of security, to the extent that it manages and limits political discourse. Therefore, in order to avoid a shadowban, users must post cautiously.

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[60] Benjamin Chacon, "Is the Instagram Shadowban Killing Your Engagement? Here's How to Fix it," *Later*, April 28, 2017, https://later.com/blog/instagram-shadowban/.

[61] Brent Barnhart, "How to Survive (and Outsmart) the Instagram Algorithm in 2020," *Sprout Social*, February 24, 2021. https://sproutsocial.com/insights/instagram-algorithm/.

[62] Cathy O'Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increase Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 2016/2017), 180.

In their guidelines, Instagram has explained that content containing "credible threats or hate speech" or content that degrades or shames individuals will be removed. On numerous occasions, I have received messages from users stating that posts such as the Goldilocks picture are racist against White people. While I do believe that people of color can be racist against White people, I do not believe this was the case with the Goldilocks post.[63] The concept of White fragility seems to be more appropriate.[64] White fragility corresponds to the various ways White people push back when challenged about racism. The critique of Goldilocks incited Whites to report the post because it made them feel, perhaps threatened, disrespected, or acrimonious. Through this example, we see how critiques of racist structures are manipulated by the right and categorized as offensive hate speech that threatens the vitality of the population.

Consequently, the juridical understanding of hate speech obfuscates the numerous ways individuals and institutions are regulated by discursive practices, thus, furthering how oppression is normalized.[65] In other words, claiming hate speech distracts from the ways systemic racism operates writ large. In an effort to be "fair," Instagram, corroborated the supremacy of Whiteness by upholding that the Goldilocks post was indeed a racist offense, thus, enacting their own kind of violence against racial minorities. However, I can also report posts I believe are racially offensive. In this way, through a logic of fairness, safety, and security, we see how Instagram deploys community guidelines to justify the status quo of White supremacy. This in turn, allows Instagram to evade accusation of intentionality, prejudice, or complicity with any particular side.

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[63] See Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994), 73.

[64] Robin DiAngelo, "White Fragility: Why It's so Hard to Talk to White People About Racism," *Good Men Project,* April 9, 2015, https://goodmenproject.com/featured-content/White-fragility-why-its-so-hard-to-talk-to-White-people-about-racism-twlm/#sthash.KbElJORV.dpuf

[65] Benjamin Baez, *Affirmative Action, Hate Speech, and Tenure: Narratives About Race, Law and the Academy* (New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002), 6.

WokeWednesdays and Parrhesia

WokeWednesdays, like many other social justice pages, is committed to addressing issues that affect vulnerable communities. Other social justice pages, along with WokeWednesdays, engage in what might be considered a form of parrhesia. For Foucault, parrhesia was the courageous act of speaking the truth in spite of risks and consequences.[66] But there is another important side to the "parrhesiastic game;" the courage to listen. Not everything can be considered parrhesiastic, according to Foucault. Unlike rhetoric, where the speaker is not necessarily committed to their ideals, the parrhesiast establishes a bond with their audience, displays a commitment to their beliefs, and speaks despite what others may think, even if it means risking their relationship.[67] By establishing this pact or bond, the audience recognizes that they have to "listen to the person who takes the risk of telling them the truth" no matter how hurtful the truth may be.[68]

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[66] Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II: Lectures at the College de France 1983 – 1984*, trans. Graham Burchell, eds. Frederic Gros, Francois Ewald, Alessandro Fontana, and Arnold I. Davidson (New York, NY: Picador, 2008/2011), 13.
[67] Ibid., 11-14.
[68] Ibid., 12.

On WokeWednesdays, I routinely share and post my opinions and thoughts regarding social justice issues. By choosing to follow the WokeWednesdays page, followers are recognizing and agreeing that they will hear my truth. Our interactions through WokeWednesdays allows for a bond to form between myself and followers. I made a post on April 22, 2021, that might help clarify the notion of courageous listening. In the post I said the following:

> If you left your country because of injustice, then surely you can understand why people here can protest something they believe to be unjust…maybe Miami is just a unique place within the context of the United States, nevertheless, I just don't understand how you can leave a place you believe to be unjust, come here, and then criticize people for protesting a situation they believe to be unjust.

The caption to my post said, "here's a controversial thought." In this caption I was informing followers that some people may take exception to my post. One person commented, "you keep pointing out the hypocrisy and I'm here for it!" Their comment was in support of a truth I was putting forth.

This post is an example of the parrhesiastic game that Foucault outlined. First, my post is an example of the courage to speak. In fact, every post is courageous because I never know what kind of backlash I am going to receive. Second, the post is also demonstrative of the courage to listen. By establishing a bond with followers, the followers have accepted to listen and reflect on the truth I believe to be espousing. Our relationship can be characterized as courageous because of (a) my attempt to speak and (b) my followers efforts to listen. Now, I would also like to connect the speaking aspect of parrhesia with some arguments put forth by Cornel West.

In numerous YouTube lectures Cornel West has argued that the condition of truth is always allowing suffering to speak.[69] Building on Foucault and West, we could say that parrhesia, at a fundamental level, involves a deep commitment to the most vulnerable. But what does commitment look like? How must it be enacted? I am not sure how to answer these questions necessarily. But I do believe that social media has opened avenues for political imagination, intervention, and hope. In another interview, Cornel West argued that for him, *having* hope is not enough; *having* is too “detached,” too “spectatorial.” West argued that you have to be a “participant, an agent,” and I would also add: active. For West, you have to be hope. Being hope manifests in the courageous acts and risks we take in efforts to be a force for social good.[70]

WokeWednesdays, in particular, has been an attempt at engaging in parrhesia. In doing WokeWednesdays I have been accused of being racist, of hating men, and of loathing straight people. Despite experiencing other forms of verbal harassment, this is part of the work; we are hope through our actions and activities (i.e., activisms). Yet, activism seems to always be enacted in a locus of constraints. On social media, specifically, posts are at constant risk of being deemed injurious acts of speech and, thus, reported to Instagram. Social media serves as an example to highlight the ways activism is limited and constrained in efforts to provide a "safe" and "secure" space for the Instagram population.

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[69] Commonwealth Club, *An Evening with Dr. Cornel West,* April 25, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAYLKvUeWNo&t=824s

[70] Radio Open Source, *Dr. Cornel West on the Unpopular James Baldwin,* February 23, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2kH6kSY6ps.

By limiting what is posted, these relations of power become governmental, in the sense that it aims to manage political discourse. In this way, Instagram seeks to create appropriate forms of citizenship. Those who fall outside the appropriate discourse or those who threaten the safety and security of the Instagram population, run the risk of expulsion. The constraining of political discourse exposes that censorship may not necessarily be about safety, but rather, about maintaining the economic powers of Instagram and its stakeholders.

Nevertheless, social media continues to be a powerful activating tool. To the extent that social media radicalizes both the right and left, we should consider it not necessarily good or bad, but dangerous. Interestingly, the WokeWednesdays show has never been flagged. The shows were recorded live and ranged between one to two hours. The guests and I were honest about systemic oppressions that exist both domestically and globally; we were unapologetic about our positions, and yet, the show was never reported. And now, as we are subject to our homes (for those of us privileged enough to have shelter) in the midst of a global pandemic, we continue to see how activists relentlessly wield social media in efforts to allow suffering to speak. Instead of arguing against online activism, maybe more of us should get to posting.

Summary

Despite the critiques of social media activism, online advocacy, whether for good or evil, is a productive activating tool. To buttress my argument, I analyzed WokeWednesdays. For the past four years, WokeWednesdays has been a way that I attempt to activate others. I have made quotidian posts, I have answered messages from followers, and I have spent my personal money despite having an atrocious salary; I have also hosted over 100 episodes. Most episodes were hosted in Miami, but at times, some episodes where hosted in different parts of the country, particularly when I was traveling for academic conferences.

Despite my efforts, neoliberalism has a way of seducing the individual. I was offered different ways of monetizing WokeWednesdays by Amazon. And while neoliberalism has dominating dimensions, there are emancipatory aspects as well. Despite its emancipatory traits, social media activism has limitations. Censorship is one of the ways online activism is limited. As I demonstrated, under the guise of “community safety,” online advocacy runs the risk of being censored and flagged, thus, sabotaging attempts to activate. This is especially intriguing especially as we begin to think of the impact of Donald Trump’s twitter account. Nevertheless, in spite of the censorship barriers, online activism must continue. In these times, it might be the most crucial activating tool we have. In the final chapter of my dissertation I will outline the findings and implications of this study.

CHAPTER TEN

FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FINAL WORDS

In this study I have attempted to make a cultural analysis regarding activism. In doing so, I have explored numerous components that comprise a culture of activism. As I have demonstrated, the main ingredient in activism is activation (and deactivation). In this final chapter, I will first provide a summary of my study. Next, I will specifically answer my research questions. Third, I will share my research findings. Fourth, I present the implications and recommendations for future research. I will conclude this chapter by offering final words.

How do activists manage (and are managed by) emotions in relation to their activist work?

Summary of Study

Utilizing an ethnographic approach, and thus drawing from myriad data sources, the purpose of this study was to explore a culture of activism. The questions that guided this study were: (a) what is activism? (b) how do emotions work as activating and deactivating events in activism? (c) and, how do emotions work in the activism associated with addressing injustices relating to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation? To begin answering these questions, I started Chapter Two (literature review) with a historical overview of the way student activism, particularly in relation to social justice, has been conceptualized in higher education. As I demonstrated, much of what is considered to be “activism” in higher education literature is generally understood in terms of protests (e.g., marches, boycotts, and sit-ins). Researchers have also highlighted that unlike activism, organizing entails a more strategic quality, where individuals are assembled to address a particular political purpose.

Because at a root level activism is about movement, a culture of activism refers to a concern with the ways people are drawn out, moved, or in other words, activated, through various practices, engagements, interactions, and relations for political purposes. As such, activation is the basis for both activism and organizing. Building on the work from prior researchers, I considered that if "organizing" refers to a strategic, intentional effort to assemble individuals for political purposes; and if "activism" is generally understood in terms of marches, boycotts, and other forms of outward expressions which reflect student protest, then, perhaps activation is what undergirds both concepts. Concepts such as "assemble," "organize," "march," protest," and "boycott" refer to forms of movements and activities. And since activation refers to the ways people are induced to move, organizing and activism cannot happen without activating individuals to move.

But before laying out the extent of my argument, I had to propose an appropriate methodological approach for my study. Unlike other studies about student activism and social identity that have privileged qualitative interviews, I argued that an ethnographic approach, one which pulls from numerous data sources, might reveal new and unique information about student activism.

In Chapter Three I reviewed the data sources that informed this study: formal and informal interviews, formal interviews with my research participants and informal ones with others (e.g., professors, friends, etc.); casual conversations; text and Instagram messaging; participant observations at various events and places and field notes (these notes were taken in and after both observations and interviews); autoethnographic data (fieldnotes relating to personal experiences and reflections captured in journal entries); artifacts gathered from social media (Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube posts, which include memes, writings, online articles and blogs, and videos) and from popular sources (e.g., biographies, sitcoms, cartoons, and films); and finally, scholarly materials concerned with college students, activism, identity, race, gender, class, and sexual orientation.

I did not always explicitly refer to every single source of data throughout this study. I highlight these data sources because in some capacity, they influenced my line of thinking, whether I realized it or not. After coding and analyzing the data, three themes stood out to me: activism and activation, emotions, and identity through emotions. Before addressing these themes, in Chapter Four, I provided a brief profile for each research participant, including myself. Because I refer to these participants throughout the study, the profile helps contextualize my arguments.

In Chapter Five I laid out a detailed analysis of activism, activation, and deactivation. Building on the work of Michel Foucault, I put forth that activations, like power, have a relational quality, thus, making the potential to activate omnipresent. As such, the possibility to be activated and deactivated lie in the relations all around us. I utilized data from Bonny in order to elucidate my point regarding activation and deactivation.

In addition to activations, within a culture of activism, there are also activators. Activators are individuals who carry the capacity to move others. And while anyone can be an activator, in Chapter Five I focused on two main activators: the artist and the organizer. I further expressed that activators, whether for good or evil, are dangerous. What makes activators dangerous is their potential to activate.

Because activations and deactivations can be triggered by anyone or anything, in Chapter Six I proposed that emotions also have a certain way of shaping our behavior (e.g., making us either move or halt). Following Foucault, I considered that in certain contexts emotions can have a governmental quality that can work to either activate or deactivate the individual. But as I realized in my data analysis, emotions can also structure the way identity regarding race, class, gender, and sexual orientation is conceptualized. Even if only for a moment, emotions can serve as a framework for constructing our perception of others. Which is why in subsequent chapters, I also focus on emotions.

In Chapter Six, I positioned Duende as the protagonist of several stories that allow us to see how fear activates and also serves as a framework for identity. In Chapter Seven, I focused on the emotion of anger. Once again, I positioned a research participant, Ally, as the main character to explore aspects of this activating and deactivating emotion. Finally, in Chapter Eight I explored the connection between love and rage through the character of Marwa. While the research participants were the focus of these chapters, I also drew from numerous sources of data to supplement my arguments.

In Chapter Nine, I took a step back and reflected on one of the ways I approach political work with WokeWednesdays. As the founder and administrator of a large social justice Instagram platform, I am uniquely positioned to wonder about the inner workings of social media activism. I utilized a governmental framework to address the ways I attempt to activate or shape the behaviors of followers. Not being able to prove that a post activated someone is where I find hope.

Hope sometimes lies in the clandestine or in what is not necessarily observable. I cannot prove that a post activated someone; perhaps that is a good thing. Proving that a post activated someone could lead to further censorship. Lacking a causal connection might actually be beneficial for the work we do. In fact, maybe saying that social media activism is not real might also be politically valuable. Deeming this work as not real might allow us to engage in more of this work without being as heavily policed. Clearly, there are numerous ways to resist, subvert, and fight against oppression. There is no one way; there are many.

Findings

This section is comprised of two parts. First, I will answer each research question. Second, I will address other findings in my study. My first research question was: what is activism? One of the situations that activated my study to begin with, was the narrow conceptualization of activism in both academic and non-academic circles. The conceptualization of activism is often reduced to marches, protests, and boycotts. Consequently, activism that occurs through social media is deemed as “not real” activism. I began this study by thinking that activism can manifest in numerous ways. In this study, my specific concern was with a culture of activism.

There are myriad conceptualizations of activism. I decided that it would be futile to propose a definitive definition of activism. Instead, I offered a conceptualization of what I mean by activism. In my research I found that the etymology of the term activism is a combination of “active” and “ism.” “Active” comes from the Latin term *actus*, or “to drive, draw out or forth, move" (see Etymology Online Dictionary, 2020). "Ism," implies a system, a practice, or a doctrine. Raymond Williams has also proposed that a theory of culture is a "study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life."[1]

Building on Williams' definition, I suggested that a culture of activism reflects a concern with the ways people are drawn out, moved, or in other words, activated (or deactivated) through various practices, engagements, interactions, and of course, relations. Whether activism is understood in terms of marches, protests, and boycotts, I found that activations is the most fundamental component within activism. In order to engage in marches, protests, and boycotts, one must be activated to do so. Thus, I proposed that activations are the act before the act. My conceptualization of activism is complimented by Foucault's understanding of power.

For Foucault, power is everywhere because it is relational. Foucault suggested that power is everywhere because it is "produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere."[2] Like power, I argued that the potential for activations are also everywhere because of their relational quality. Individuals can be activated at any moment, by anyone, or anything. But what exactly is activism? Activism has many manifestations. But at a root level, activism is about the ways people are moved to engage in political work, whether for good or evil.

My second research question was: how to do emotions work as activating and deactivating events in activism? I began to explore this question in Chapter Five

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[1] Raymond Williams, "The Analysis of Culture," in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* 2nd ed. Ed, John Storey (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 48-56, 52.
[2] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 93.

(activations) with Bonny. Bonny expressed that they felt a sense of guilt because they did not engage in what they believed to be activism. In the subsequent three chapters I provided a more detailed analysis of four emotions: fear, anger, love, and rage. I concluded that any emotion has the ability to propel or thwart someone into activist endeavors. Duende learned about fear throughout his life, particularly in relation to immigration and incarceration. Years later, these fears would come to propel Duende to engage in activist work that relates to these specific issues (i.e., immigration and incarceration).

In the case of Ally, anger proved to be a more volatile emotion that both deactivated and activated him. I argued that for a moment, Ally was deactivated by anger. This is not to say that Ally did not feel anger, but rather, that he did not act on it. Moments later, because of its volatile nature, anger led Ally to engage in physical and verbal confrontations with classmates. While anger is a productive force, we must be leery about the ways it induces people to act.

Love and rage were the final emotions that I discussed; I explored these emotions through Marwa. I suggested that is her love for Black people that leads her to become enraged, specifically in moments of injustice. Rage is not always an emotion that can be outwardly recognized. At times, rage can be invisible. And despite its invisibility, rage can still drive the individual to engage in activist endeavors (e.g., write blogs, organize, start a national petition). Moreover, it is her deep commitment and affinity to Black people, what I understand to be love for the purposes of this dissertation, that motivates Marwa’s rage in moments when Black people endure injustice.

My final research question was: how do emotions work in the activism associated with addressing injustices relating to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation? I also addressed this question in Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight. I suggested that emotions can serve as a framework to understand notions of identity, even if only for a moment. I do not mean to suggest that participants have a static understanding of identity. Rather, that emotions such as fear, anger, love, and rage, can be frameworks to make sense of identity in particular moments.

For example, by the time Duende was born, his grandmother had already experienced traumatic encounters. These encounters positioned wealthy White people as a source of fear. Because of this, Duende also learned about the way dark skin, womanness, immigration status, and lack of English can be weaponized against someone in the United States. Duende learned that such identity markers can make someone vulnerable to threats, violence, incarceration, and deportation. Because wealthy White people put Duende's grandmother in harm's way, Duende also learned that wealthy White people can represent danger and fear.

Regarding anger as an identity framework, I explored the film *Crash*. I proposed that Ms. Johnson's name did not register with Officer Ryan until his anger activated him. Had their interaction been positive, then the racial/gender nature of the conversation might have been mediated. As I stated earlier, prior to saying her name, Officer Ryan had not displayed any sense of racist undertones against Ms. Johnson. But once he was at his boiling point and Ms. Johnson said her name, anger fueled his racial attitude. This anger prompted Officer Ryan to succumb to what our society teaches us to do in moments of tipping points: to act on our prejudices.

Finally, as it pertains to love and rage, I suggested that it was Marwa's deep affinity and commitment, what I call love, that induced her rage. Yes, both love and rage played a role in activating Marwa. But love in particular, was the emotion through which Marwa understands Blackness.[3] For Marwa, the world is constructed on the premise of anti-Blackness. As I mentioned earlier, Sara Ahmed has argued how at times forms of "anti-ness" can be understood as an expression of hatred.[4] As such, to suggest that the world is built on anti-Blackness means that the world is constructed upon the hatred of Black people. Following her Afro-pessimistic beliefs, Marwa suggested that the only way forward is "to destroy the world," which would mean destroying anti-Blackness. If anti-Blackness means hatred, then, we can infer that Blackness can mean love.

Destroying a world of anti-Blackness would mean to destroy a world that is premised on anti-Black violence. And to create a world without "anti-Blackness," and rather, with Blackness, would mean to create a world where Blackness is understood through a prism of love. As such, I argue that love is the emotion through which Marwa understands Blackness. And because Marwa loves Black people, she is enraged at the sight of the injustice that targets Black people. In addition to answering my research questions, I also want to share other findings.

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[3] *Love* is a loaded term because of the multiple contexts in which it can be used (e.g., romantic love, parental love, etc.). But for the purposes of my analysis, love simply refers to the empathy, affinity, loyalty, or commitment towards ending injustice.

[4] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 123. In her analysis, Ahmed is discussing the way hate groups reappropriate the language of love and hate. Ahmed writes that as a result of such a reappropriation, "critics of hate groups become defined as those who hate, those who act out of a sense of 'anti-ness' or 'against-ness', and thus those who not only cannot protect the bodies of White Americans from crimes, but re-enact such crimes in the use of the language of hate." I do not wish to get into the specifics of her argument. I simply wish to point out that the logic of "anti-ness" can be understood as an linguistic expression of hatred.

Before starting this study, I conceptualized activism in the more traditional sense: marches, boycotts, and other forms of protest. One early finding that I learned as I began to analyze the data was that of activation. I have put forth that activation is the basis for any type of political movement. Because political movements, whether understood as organizing or activism, are concerned with types of movement, no movement can occur without some type of activation. Activation concerns itself with the ways individuals are induced and compelled to act. Regarding deactivation, as we saw with Bonny and Ally, how in certain moments emotions can also halt, restrict, and even silence us.

Another finding pertains to the temporality of activations. In the case of Duende, I explored the way fear played a role in much of their life. Since childhood, Duende's fear became associated with incarceration, immigration, and family separation. This fear led and compelled Duende to engage in activist endeavors relating to that which were sources of fear for him in the first place: immigration and incarceration. Interestingly, it seems that the motivation to act, in relation to social justice endeavors, can begin at a young age. Lessons experienced throughout childhood can later lead to further political engagement, particularly among those individuals who come from marginalized populations.

But activations, whether for good or evil, are a precarious endeavor. In some cases, emotions can have a combustible quality (i.e., anger). In Chapter Seven we saw that while anger can be a productive force, but it can also lead individuals to burn themselves and others. In some situations, anger can activate the individual in a violent and racist manner, as we saw with the film *Crash.* But what happens when anger turns into rage? Particularly a rage that is connected to notions of love?

I found that in some cases if rage can be motivated by love, it can induce the individual to engage in social justice endeavors. Such a rage can be characterized as courageous, as in the case with Marwa. Her rage, which was transmitted through her blog, was an unapologetic attempt to confront White supremacy. Like Malcolm X, Marwa did not seem to espouse a type of Black supremacy, but rather, a rejection of "Black capacity to a White supremacist ideology and practice."[5] Perhaps Marwa's actions are also indicative of the type of parrhesia that Foucault highlights.

For Foucault, as I stated in the previous chapter, parrhesia was the courageous act of speaking the truth and also listening, in spite of risks and consequences.[6] The audacious and vehement manner in which Marwa articulates her rage makes the blogs courageous. Not only this, but the articles on the website have her name and picture published at the end of her blog, making her more susceptible to targeted violence. To be clear, I do not want to suggest that a rage encouraged by love is necessarily a "good thing." Nonetheless, I am highlighting the way love and rage might induce the individual to act in a courageous manner.

Listening is another aspect of parrhesia that is vital, particularly as it pertains to WokeWednesdays. Yes, speaking truths is courageous, but so is listening. WokeWednesdays followers listen to the truths I espouse; in turn, I also listen to them (e.g., read comments and messages). This act forms a pact, one that is itself courageous. Despite the courageous aspects of online activism, this form of activism has also been heavily critiqued in the last few years. However, this position is limited and restrictive. Critiques claiming that online activism is actually slacktivism, works to foreclose imaginative, activating possibilities. WokeWednesdays also exemplifies another possibility for engaging in social justice work.

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[5] Cornel West, *Race Matters*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993), 143.

[6] Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II: Lectures at the College de France 1983 – 1984*, trans. Graham Burchell, eds. Frederic Gros, Francois Ewald, Alessandro Fontana, and Arnold I. Davidson (New York, NY: Picador, 2008/2011), 13.

WokeWednesdays, both the page and the show, demonstrate the way activist endeavors are at risk of being co-opted by neoliberal tactics. And yet, even in the midst of co-opting, social media activism carries the possibility of activating others to engage in their own activisms. This alludes to yet another finding, the cyclical nature of activation. By cyclical I mean, once an individual is activated to act, they might also activate someone else, forming a pattern. Activations can lead to more activations. In the case of Marwa, she was activated, compelled to publish blogs online. The words, candor, and substance of her argument, indicative of her rage and love, carry the possibility to activate others, so on and so forth. Activations can manifest in manifold ways. It might lead the individual to protest, become a community organizer, run for public office, or write a letter to their local politician. Whatever the action, whether for good or evil, the point is that activations can lead to more activations.

Implications

I highlighted four emotions in this study: fear, anger, love, and rage. Part of what makes emotions powerful, as I have suggested, is the possibility to activate or deactivate the individual. But what about the notion of appeasement? How does appeasement relate to activism writ large? I propose that appeasement can be understood as an attempt to deactivate. Appeasement, then, is one of the most lethal sensations we can feel.

Appeasement is dangerous because of its capacity to deactivate. But how might this be understood in relation to higher education?

Appeasement is that which provides pleasure and thus diminishes pain. And as we saw throughout this study, activism is often a response to an injustice. Activism, in all its iterations, acts as a response to that which causes pain. Let us suppose that the pain or injustice was diminished in some capacity. The alleviation of pain could possibly lead to appeasement, and, thus, a certain type of happiness. I am not suggesting that we reject efforts to alleviate or redress present and past injustices. However, I am skeptical about the politics of appeasement, particularly by institutions of higher education.

Decades ago Bruce Johnstone pointed out that when student power is channeled through "formal, high level, or all-college decision making bodies," it simply becomes the token representation of a student.[7] Such institutional attempts intentionally aim to appease students. By attempting to appease, the university is in actuality attempting to deactivate, or rather, halt and quelch student movement (i.e., student activist endeavors). In Chapter Two of this dissertation I highlighted some of the overt, authoritarian ways institutions have attempted to deactivate student activists (e.g., Southern and Grambling State University). Another way to appease students, particularly at my institution, Florida International University, is through town hall meetings. I will provide an example to buttress my point.

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd was murdered by police officer, Derek Chauvin. The murder of George Floyd activated millions around the world to engage in various acts of protest. In response to this act of police brutality, Florida International University hosted two events beginning in June 2020. On June 3, 2020, FIU hosted an online session where panelists addressed "whether the unrest witnessed at demonstrations throughout the world will lead to change."[8] Two days later, FIU hosted a virtual town hall meeting where students, faculty, and staff were able to express "what was in their hearts and on their minds during this crucial time in our nation's history."[9] We might say that this town hall meeting was meant to be a place where students, faculty, and staff could vent. In our society, there seems to be a belief that venting is cathartic. Or for example, that venting allows individuals to purge themselves of their anger.[10] Perhaps this is why FIU insists on town hall meetings when such horrific moments of social injustice occur. I will come back to this point momentarily.

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[7] Bruce Johnstone, "The Student and His Power," *The Journal of Higher Education* 40, no. 3 (1969): 205-218, 206.

While I agree that town halls are important, these meetings seem to be reactionary. It was only in reaction to this egregious act of police brutality that FIU decided to have a town hall meeting. Such meetings are not held on a consistent basis at the university. Because of their reactionary nature, I argue that these town hall meetings are meant to appease or mitigate the "negative" emotions (e.g., anger, rage, sadness) of students, faculty, and staff. As such, these town hall meetings attempt to bring some type of calmness, reassurance, relief and happiness to the FIU community.

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[8] FIU E-mail, sent June 22, 2020.

[9] Ibid., June 22, 2020.

[10] Brad J. Bushman, "Does Venting Anger Feed or Extinguish the Flame? Catharsis, Rumination, Distraction, Anger, and Aggressive Responding," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 28, no. 6 (2002): 724-731, 724.

According to Sara Ahmed, happiness is often described as what "we aim for, as an endpoint, or even an end in itself."[11] If appeasement leads to happiness, then appeasement might also represent a type of endpoint. Another way of saying endpoint could be death. In this way, appeasement comes to be what murders the emotions which compel and propel us to continue fighting. However, according to Brad Bushman, catharsis does not necessarily appease the individual. In the case of anger, Bushman found that utilizing venting as a way to reduce anger is like "using gasoline to put out a fire—it only feeds the flame."[12] Institutions of higher education should have more town halls, more venting, more expression of feelings. Doing so could potentially activate more people and lead to more institutional change. But as FIU has proven, such town halls are only conducted as a reactionary response to social injustices. FIU's failure to have more town hall meetings might be indicative of their commitment to the status quo.

Absolutely, injustices need to be addressed. But as I have suggested, I am skeptical, and perhaps even cynical, about so-called "solutions." My assumption is that "solutions," thus appeasement, could thwart the drive and energy of social justice work. This makes activations even more vital to a culture of activism. And given the relational quality of activation, the potential capacity to activate is everywhere. Therefore, one implication I would like to offer is the need for vigilance. Activating vigilance could be an approach to combat appeasement. Perhaps one way to stay vigilant is to have more town hall meetings as I have indicated. Another way to stay vigilant is activating through social media. Throughout this study I pushed back on the critiques of social media activism. Through WokeWednesdays I tried to offer insight on the importance of this political approach. Eddie Glaude's work is particularly insightful regarding social media activism.

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[11] Sara Ahmed, "Happy Objects," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 21-51, 33.
[12] Bushman, "Does Venting Anger Feed," 729.

According to Glaude, we must all bear witness. Bearing witness means to "tell the story… [to] bring the suffering to the attention of those who wallow in willful ignorance…[and to] shatter the illusion of innocence at every turn and attack all the shibboleths the country holds sacred."[13] Recording and posting horrific injustices on social media is one of the ways we can tell the story, garner attention, and thus, bear witness. Doing so represents an effort to make "the suffering real…[with hopes of making] the world pay attention to it."[14] For Glaude, exposing human suffering might make the world pay attention to injustice. Differently said, exposing the pain of injustice might activate the world to move. Therefore, social media activism is one of the most instrumental aspects within a culture of activism.

This also makes WokeWednesdays unique because not only does it utilize social media as a medium for activation, but it also incorporates research as a technique for activation. In the wake of George Floyd's murder, numerous WokeWednesdays followers sent me similar messages. One person asked, "Do you have any books you can recommend? I want to help but I'm not sure how."[15] For this individual, reading literature could potentially move them to act, to fight against racial injustice. Because so many people reached out, I decided to record videos suggesting books I find to be important regarding oppression. In addition to these books, I have also put a link on the

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[13] Eddie Glaude, *Begin Again*, (New York, NY: Crown, 2020), 53.
[14] Ibid., 54.
[15] Personal communication, Direct Message, Instagram

WokeWednesdays page, connecting followers to my publications. Therefore, another implication that I want to offer is that research itself is capable of activating individuals to act in numerous ways.

In the short film, *James Baldwin: From Another Place*, Baldwin alludes to the desire of activating others through his research. In the film he says, “I am worried about getting my work done, getting on paper, which is the best way for me, a certain record, which hopefully would be of some value to somebody, some day.”[16] In this short quote Baldwin describes a certain angst. His angst exists in relation to the potential inability to finish what he was writing. The reason it is so important for him to write is because maybe one day, his work might be of value to someone. That is, his work might move someone in a particular way. Coincidently, Baldwin's work has been important in both my personal and academic life. His work has activated me to continue writing and working, even in my moments of despair. Without a doubt, research is one of the ways academics can engage in forms of activation.

Future Directions

I see this study as an introduction to numerous ideas that relate to activism, emotions, and identity. I believe there are years of research here that I hope to unpack in my academic career. As a researcher, there were many ways to approach the data; I have only begun to scratch the surface. There were many quotes and ideas that I decided not to address because it did not necessarily relate to my arguments. In time, I hope to go back, re-read, and re-analyze, as I am sure new ideas will surface.

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[16] Sedat Pakay, “James Baldwin – From Another Place (Sedat Pakay, 1970),” YouTube, August 21, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKFRGUcl0Jo.

There are a few areas I would like to explore in the future. First, I am interested in the ways political work is co-opted by neoliberal ideology. In Chapter Six, I reflected on the ways I flirt with neoliberalism as it relates to WokeWednesdays. With the advent of social media, the manner in which individuals participate in politics is changing; it has become more democratic, but it is also a space that abounds with economic logic.

According to Forbes, a 19-year-old college student earned $5,000,000 on TikTok, due to her large following of 54.1 million followers.[17] Recently, a friend text me angrily because Shaun King, a well-known social-media activist, is "capitalizing off Black people who are murdered…this man [Jacob Blake] got shot yesterday & he's already like check out my podcast guys."[18] And yet, only a few weeks ago, this same friend was encouraging me to advertise on WokeWednesdays to have an extra source of income. By no means am I lambasting her, but rather, I use this example to highlight the complexities that exist between political work and one's livelihood. What does it actually mean for political work to be "co-opted?" I hope to address this in future research.

Another area that calls my attention is humor. In Chapter Five, I proposed that one of the most important, and thus, dangerous activators, is the artist. I reflected on various forms of artistry: music, poetry, and acting. I think the artist as comedian is also a unique activator as it relates to social justice endeavors, particularly in a time where cancel/call-out culture is rampant. Modern call-out culture, according to Austin Hooks, refers to a “form of public shaming that aims to hold individuals responsible for perceived politically incorrect behavior on social media.”[19]

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[17] Abram Brown, "TikTok's 7 Highest-Earning Starts: New Forbes List Led By Teen Queens Addison Rae and Charli D'Amelio," *Forbes*, August 6, 2020. https://www.forbes.com/sites/abrambrown/2020/08/06/tiktoks-highest-earning-stars-teen-queens-addison-rae-and-charli-damelio-rule/#23ef412a5087.

[18] Personal communication, text message

Comedian Dave Chappelle has described this current moment in time as one of “social precision.”[20] Hooks and Chappelle highlight the way individuals (some more than others) are expected to always be politically correct and socially precise. Failing to uphold a politically correct persona leads to shaming and canceling the individual. And perhaps, for those who engage in forms of social advocacy, this expectation of social precision may be heightened.

In addition to this area of study, more research needs to be done on other types of student activists. In my study I focused on students who do social justice work, on those students who wish to see a more inclusive world. And while all forms of activation are dangerous, there are some that are more dangerous than others. Understanding the way right wing students are either activated or deactivated would also be an interesting study.

Another area of study pertains to appeasement. Johnstone highlighted the way student organizations and student leadership positions work to appease the student body. I also pointed out the way institutional responses such as town hall meetings can work to appease students, faculty, and staff. But I am curious to study the other ways institutions attempt to appease. More specifically, I would like to see which groups of student, faculty, and staff the university attempts to appease and how? But perhaps, it might also be noteworthy to explore the ways higher education institutions also either advertently or inadvertently activate students, faculty, and staff. As we saw with Bonny, part of the reason they went to Standing Rock is because they became upset with FIU; they were activated by FIU.

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[19] Austin Hooks, “Cancel Culture: Post-Human Hauntologies in Digital Rhetoric and the Latent Values of Virtual Community Networks,” (Thesis, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, 2020), 4.

[20] “Have TENACITY To See Your Vision Through – Dave Chappelle – Top 10 Rules,” *Video Explode*, November 18, 2017. https://www.vexplode.com/en/motivational/have-tenacity-to-see-your-vision-through-dave-chappelle-top-10-rules-2/?t=00:10:58.

Final Words

I began collecting data in 2019. Little did I know that a year later we would be enduring a global pandemic that has affected and killed countless people around the world, particularly the most vulnerable of our society. In this same year, we also witnessed one of the largest protests regarding police brutality in past decades. In many ways, this dissertation that focuses on political activism, was an attempt to wrestle with my own agony, anger, and despair. In some ways, this dissertation also represents what Glaude calls an “elsewhere.” The elsewhere, according to Glaude, refers to a “physical or metaphorical place that affords the space to breathe, to refuse adjustment and accommodation to the demand of society, and to live apart, if just for a time, from the deadly assumptions that threaten to smother.”[21]

At times, this dissertation served as a place that allowed me to breathe; to live apart from the world around me that was so clearly in pain. Listening to music, reading books, watching movies, and going for runs, were activities that came to represent a type of elsewhere. So yes, the elsewhere might be a place of refuge that can provide a sense of shelter, even if only for a short moment. But the elsewhere might also represent a type of refueling station. A station that provides safety. A place that reinvigorates and rebuilds our hope and vigilance. A station that perhaps activates. And while we may still be fearful or angry upon leaving the elsewhere, we might also leave with a sense of hope. And if you ever forget what hope is, look in the mirror, for you, the activist, are the embodiment of hope.

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[21] Glaude, *Begin Again*, 130.

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Appendix A

First Formal Interview Questions

This semi-structured interview guide includes questions that were used for the first set of formal interviews. Not every question was asked necessarily and additional follow-up questions were used when appropriate.

1. Tell me about yourself and your background.
2. Why did you become an activist?
3. What is an activist?
4. What are your day-to-day practices as they pertain to activism?
5. Why do you consider yourself an activist?
6. How does race/ethnicity/class/gender/sexuality matter to you?
    a. How does race/ethnicity/class/gender/sexuality influence your activism?
7. To what extent do you believe people have a moral obligation to do activist work?

Possible probe questions:

1. Where and how does your activism take place?
2. Does social media play a role in your activism? If so, how?

Appendix B

Immigration Interview Questions

This semi-structured interview guide includes questions that were used for the interview regarding immigration. Not every question was asked necessarily, and additional follow-up questions were used when appropriate.

1. Could you describe what the "immigrant experience" means to you, or what comes to mind?
2. Let's talk about the undocumented experience
3. What are some of the ways your activism addresses immigration? For example, is it through student organizations? Non-profits?
4. Who are the communities you think of when it comes to immigration
5. What are some of the ways you think immigrants behave versus non-immigrants or non-undocumented people?
6. Can you tell me about experiences with immigration as a child?

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