

“NO.. LIKE YOU DON’T GET IT”: THE FUNCTIONALITY OF CONFLICT SPEECH
AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE YOUNG ADULT FEMINIST IDENTITY ON
TUMBLR

by

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ABSTRACT

CAITLIN COSPER. “No.. like you don’t get it”: The functionality of conflict speech and the construction of the young adult feminist identity on Tumblr.
(Under the direction of DR. PILAR GARCÉS CONEJOS-BLITVICH)

As social media grew in popularity, online discourse became a more frequent focus of study because it represented an entirely new form of communication. While technological innovations led to easier and more accessible communication on a global scale, they also resulted in the rise of online conflict. This study focuses on the role of conflict speech within online discourse, specifically connecting conflict to the construction of the young adult feminist identity on Tumblr, a microblogging social media platform. This study incorporates the theoretical frameworks of Culpeper (1996) and Bucholtz and Hall (2005) in combination with a close discourse analysis and thematic analysis in order to understand the functionality of conflict speech between feminist and non-feminist users within comments left on Tumblr. Through this framework and analysis, this study found that Tumblr users employed a range of discursive patterns, including quotatives, hashtags, and instances of name-calling, all while utilizing several impoliteness strategies. Moreover, this study found that there exists a distinction between conflict occurring between feminist and non-feminist Tumblr users as opposed to conflict between two or more feminist users. Through strategies like polarization and selective dissociation, Tumblr users are continuously enacting, constructing, and negotiating the young adult feminist identity when responding to and engaging in conflictual interactions. Ultimately, the conflict speech examined in this study contributes not only to the construction of this collective identity but emphasizes the value of unity within the young adult feminist identity.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	vii
LIST OF EXAMPLES	viii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	3
2.1 The Internet and online discourse	3
2.2 Tumblr: Features and conventions	5
2.3 Identity construction: A general overview	9
2.4 The young adult life stage: Identification and identity construction	13
2.5 Feminist identification and identity construction	16
2.6 Online discourse and conflict speech	23
2.7 Language aggression within conflict speech	27
2.8 Patriarchal discourse in online spaces	30
2.9 Feminist responses to conflict and misogyny: Discursive strategies and patterns	33
2.10 Online conflict speech and offline implications	37
2.11 The role of conflict speech within feminist identity construction	39
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	42
3.1 Data collection	42
3.2 A note on Internet research ethics	47
3.3 Procedure and theoretical framework	49
3.3.1 Quantitative analysis	50
3.3.2 Qualitative analysis	51

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS	56
4.1 Common themes within conflictual interactions	56
4.1.1 Recontextualization of comments	57
4.1.2 Hashtags	64
4.1.3 Name-calling	70
4.2 Conflict between feminist and non-feminist users	77
4.2.1 Exposing conflict	77
4.2.2 Buddy system	81
4.3 Conflict among feminist users	86
4.3.1 Conflict over defining feminism	87
4.3.2 Selective dissociation	93
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS	101
5.1 Ethnography	101
5.2 What role does online conflict speech play in young adult feminist identity construction?	103
5.3 How do instances of conflict between two or more feminists impact identity construction?	105
5.4 How do instances of conflict between at least one feminist and at least one non-feminist impact identity construction?	106
REFERENCES	107
APPENDIX A: Culpeper's (1996) taxonomy of impoliteness strategies	111
APPENDIX B: Culpeper's (2016) bottom-up model of impoliteness strategies	113

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: Posts by account	43
FIGURE 2: Comments included in analytical corpus	47
FIGURE 3: Comments using quotation mark	58

LIST OF EXAMPLES

EXAMPLE 1: Tumblr post and excerpt of Tumblr comments	47
EXAMPLE 2: Tumblr post and excerpt of Tumblr comments	62
EXAMPLE 3: Tumblr post and excerpt of Tumblr comments	65
EXAMPLE 4: Tumblr post and excerpt of Tumblr comments	69
EXAMPLE 5: Tumblr post and excerpt of Tumblr comments	71
EXAMPLE 6: Tumblr post and excerpt of Tumblr comments	74
EXAMPLE 7: Tumblr post and excerpt of Tumblr comments	78
EXAMPLE 8: Tumblr post and excerpt of Tumblr comments	82
EXAMPLE 9: Tumblr post and excerpt of Tumblr comments	86
EXAMPLE 10: Tumblr post and excerpt of Tumblr comments	88
EXAMPLE 11: Tumblr post and excerpt of Tumblr comments	91
EXAMPLE 12: Tumblr post and excerpt of Tumblr comments	94
EXAMPLE 13: Tumblr post and excerpt of Tumblr comments	98
EXAMPLE 14: Tumblr post and excerpt of Tumblr comments	101

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most significant technological innovation of modern society is the Internet. From search platforms like Google Images allowing Internet users the ability to find a picture of Jennifer Lopez's green dress to the now-outdated MapQuest revolutionizing travel, the Internet has left no area of the modern world untouched. Moreover, the Internet introduced users to social media, an entirely new method of communication. Researchers Junco and Chickering (2010) define social media as "a collection of web sites, services, and activities that engage users through collaboration, sharing, and democratization of roles and responsibilities" (p. 12). For their part, Page, Barton, Unger, and Zappavigna (2014) further explain that social media encourages interaction between those involved in online discourse (p. 6). As is to be expected, increased interactions between a wide variety of social media users frequently results in conflictual interactions. The presence of conflict speech has become commonplace in online environments and encompasses a wide variety of interactions ranging from minor disagreements, instances of name-calling, or aggressive and abusive language.

The present study seeks to better understand the role of conflict speech on social media platforms and determine the functionality of conflict during identity construction. In order to identify and analyze instances of conflict speech, this study will focus on the microblogging platform Tumblr, which is comprised of over 462 million profiles and more than 171 billion posts ("About Tumblr," n.d.). This study focuses specifically on the construction of the young adult feminist social identity, making Tumblr a very representative platform for this study because the majority of Tumblr users fall into the young adult age group ("Demographics of Tumblr," 2015). Using a social constructionist approach and

theoretical frameworks from both Culpeper (1996) and Bucholtz and Hall (2005), this study gathered a corpus of 471 comments equaling 12,122 total words left under 30 posts from feminist Tumblr accounts.

Chapter 2 establishes an understanding of digitally-mediated communication, conflict speech, and the identities at play in this study, as well as the specific research questions that will become the centerpiece for the analysis. Chapter 3 outlines in greater detail the theoretical frameworks that are employed in this study and is followed by further discussion and analysis of the data collected in Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the conclusions made in this study and the implications that they have in understanding the functionality of conflict speech during the identity construction of the young adult feminist group.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Internet and online discourse

While e-mail has been used as a form of online communication since the 1970s (Junco & Chickering, 2010), social media revitalized and redefined an individual's ability to participate in public discourse regardless of demographics such as age, gender, ideology, or physical location. Because technological innovations have made online discourse so easily accessible, specific discourse communities have emerged within social media platforms providing users with the ability to construct and enact identities through the interactions that occur therein.

When discussing how online social communities function, it is imperative to understand how social media users approach audience. In her article, Tagg (2016) uses Garcia and Jacobs' (1998) term "quasi-synchronous" to describe digital communication, explaining that "turns are delayed and message-receivers do not have access to the process of message production" (p. 80). In comparison to face-to-face interactions, digitally-mediated communication (DMC) does not provide the same level of synchronicity to convey a message. As Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (20010) states, "asynchronicity promotes the selective construction of messages, and provides individuals with the time to plan, compose and revise message structure and content, as well as to decide when and how much to self-disclose and to carefully arrange message exchange" (p. 542). Additionally, Page et al. (2014) explain that social media "delivers content via a network of participants where the content can be published by anyone, but still distributed across potentially large-scale audiences" (p. 6). Because of the possibility of a broad audience, social media users frequently encounter context collapse, or as Marwick and boyd (2010) describe it, a phenomenon in which various

audiences are “flattened” into a single audience (p. 122). Through context collapse, social media users attempt to communicate successfully with a broad audience that is widely imagined. Seargeant, Tagg, and Ngampramuan (2012) discuss Bakhtin’s (1986) notion of addressivity, or “the way that the composition and style of any utterance is shaped by the communicative expectations of the (imagined) addressee” (p. 515). The existence of the imagined online audience has forced social media users to adapt their understanding of a traditional addressee in order to cater to a wider and less concrete audience within online communication.

One of the most notable social media sites is Facebook, which became available in 2003 and is widely considered to be the first truly “social” media platform (Junco & Chickering, 2010). Since the introduction of Facebook, a multitude of social media sites have been published, each designed for a specific purpose or audience. For example, LinkedIn, which was published in 2003, encourages communication between users for professional purposes, while Twitter, which emerged in 2006, became one of the pioneers of microblogging (Junco & Chickering, p. 13). Wargo (2017) describes microblogging, explaining that it “allows authors to create content, categorize and/or tag it, and then share it with other users” (p. 562). As such, microblogging differs from traditional online blogging because it emphasizes brevity of content, while normal blog posts typically conform to longer narrative-style writing or prose. The original “tweet” only allowed users to display a maximum of 140 characters, making Twitter an excellent example of how microblogging functioned within online discourse and paving the way for additional microblogging platforms in the future.

As social media platforms gained popularity, online discourse developed a unique blend of features and rules of interaction that govern how communication occurs. Conflict speech has become a frequent occurrence within online interactions because of the physical separation of participants (Hardaker & McGlashan, 2016) and the availability of anonymity online. Through the physical disconnect and anonymity provided by social media, a different set of social rules has developed in terms of what is acceptable within online discourse. In addition, Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2018) points out that any interaction has the potential to be interpreted as conflictual, so frequency of conflict speech has continued to rise within online discourse.

This study will join the conversation surrounding how DMC provides social media users with the ability to employ conflict speech within public discourse. This research will focus on one specific microblogging platform, Tumblr, which grants users the ability to generate content, reblog existing posts, and interact with other accounts. Ultimately, this study aims to determine whether conflict speech can be linked to the identity construction of young adult feminists within this online space.

2.2 Tumblr: Features and conventions

While Twitter might be considered the first microblogging social media site, new platforms have surfaced over the years that match Twitter in popularity and usefulness. One of these platforms is Tumblr, which was founded in 2007 and enables users to post photos, quotes, text, audio, video, or chat with other accounts. Additionally, Tumblr allows users to reblog existing content originally published by another account and automatically gives the original author credit by citing the account name. The ability to not only produce original content on a user's Tumblr page but also reblog the content of other profiles gives users the

independence to decide what to post and participate in ongoing conversations through the comment feature. As Oakley (2016) states, “Tumblr functions as an intersection of blogging and [social networking sites]” (p. 2). In this sense, Tumblr enables users to blog about their own lives while also engaging in online discourse with other users in a manner similar to purely social sites.

While there are several similarities between Tumblr and other social media platforms, Tumblr provides a variety of affordances, features, and conventions that make it unique. For example, a user’s individual profile on Tumblr is typically not the focal point of interactions that occur. Oakley (2016) states, “While in [social networking sites] such as Facebook, users construct a profile that includes information about themselves such as age, sex/gender, location, interests, and educational background, Tumblr does not offer these same affordances” (p. 2). In fact, anonymity tends to be prioritized on Tumblr profiles and the amount of information presented is not scaffolded with questions from the site itself but is instead entirely dependent on how much the user is willing to share with the public. A prime example of this is in the way that Tumblr’s “About Me” page is constructed. The “About Me” pages on Tumblr are not expected or mandatory for Tumblr profiles, and users are not prompted with questions when filling it out. However, many of the users who do fill out the “About Me” section of their profile include information such as “their likes and dislikes (movies, music, television shows, etc.), and, in the case of some LGBTQIA bloggers, their gender and sexual orientation” (Oakley, 2016, p. 2). In thinking about the control that Tumblr grants its users, it is possible that affordances such as the “About Me” page allow for identity construction.

In addition, Tumblr also enables its users to utilize hashtags as a form of communication, which have become the focus of many studies in an attempt to understand their role within online discourse (Zappavigna, 2014; Zappavigna, 2015; Zappavigna & Martin, 2018). In her research, Zappavigna (2014) discusses hashtags, defining them as “a form of metadata that can be used to indicate the ‘aboutness’ of a post but...they also play a role in performing identity” (p. 211). In this sense, the hashtags used on Tumblr allow social media users to mark their posts initially, calling forth a specific imagined audience, while also performing their identity online by assigning “keywords” to their posts (Zappavigna, 2014, p. 211). Additionally, hashtags as metadata are collaborative and allow social media users to trace the discourse about a given subject. Zappavigna (2015) states that hashtags “[enable] individuals to search social media discourse, supporting forms of ambient communion that arise out of the ability to find what other people are talking about in quasi-‘real-time’” (p. 274). While tracing this discourse, users can employ any given hashtag, allowing them to also partake in and contribute to the conversation surrounding a topic. Furthermore, hashtags enable social media users to form bonds of solidarity or express affirmation around a given subject. Zappavigna and Martin (2018) describe this as “communing affiliation,” during which “personae can align around particular values even without directly interacting” (p. 5). In all, hashtags have become an online affordance that influences how Tumblr users form their own content, as well as how different accounts locate and interact with one another.

Because they are a clickable form of metadata, hashtags also bring up the possibility of multimodality within online discourse. Like all platforms of digital media, Tumblr offers a variety of multimodal affordances, including text, images, videos, audio, emojis, memes,

gifs, and links to other web pages. Page et al. (2014) discuss the impact of multimodality online, stating, “Social media genres have often been distinguished from their predecessors on the grounds of their increased range of multimodal resources and hence greater media richness” (p. 16). It becomes apparent that this increase in multimodality brings with it a greater richness of media when viewing the use of different modes on Tumblr. At the top of their Tumblr page, a user is prompted with visual icons representing the ability to post a photo, a quote, a link, text, audio, video, or to chat with another user. Under these prompts, Tumblr users can see all the recent posts from the accounts that they follow, which typically contain a plethora of images, videos, and gifs spaced out through their timeline. Furthermore, the richness of media is not restricted to images and videos. Tumblr users also have the ability to manipulate the visual mode of their text by choosing the text color and adding emphasis through bolding, adjusting font size, and/or employing italics. In this regard, the “media richness” (Page et al., p. 16) allowed within DMC brings with it the possibility of including multimodality in the analysis of a corpus.

While constructing and enacting one’s online identity, the potential for anonymity mixed with a separation between one’s online and offline self can result in an increased freedom to explore potential identities. In thinking about the possibility of anonymity, Wargo (2017) states, “Every user’s primary tumblelog is public. This perceived anonymity, yet public visibility, is one of the main appeals for youth on the ever-growing microblogging site” (p. 562). As Wargo says, it is true that each Tumblr account is public, and user’s certainly have the capability to include their real name within their username. However, it is a common practice on Tumblr to create an alias and refrain from using one’s legal name, resulting in an emphasis on anonymity. Hardaker and McGlashan (2016) discuss this,

explaining, “Users can invent and explore identities that they would struggle to enact convincingly, if at all, offline” (p. 82). In this sense, Tumblr users have more control over how they choose to present themselves in online discourse than they might in face-to-face interactions. Additionally, Hardaker and McGlashan (2016) mention that anonymity can lead to a concept called deindividuation, which they define as “a sense of impunity, loss of self-awareness, attitudinal polarisation, and a likelihood of acting upon normally inhibited impulses” (p. 82). In their discussion of deindividuation, Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2014) explain the Social Model of Deindividuation (SIDE), a process which emphasizes the importance of social identity while downplaying the individual identity. The tendency for deindividuation to occur online only increases the importance of exploring online identity construction, particularly in relation to conflict speech, because anonymity could then become a marker for interactions that would normally not occur offline and, as a result, impact a Tumblr user’s identity.

2.3 Identity construction: A general overview

In order to understand how identity construction occurs in digital spaces, it is important first to elaborate on how identities are formed, enacted, and negotiated through interaction. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) discuss identity construction and how it relates to interactions, claiming that identity is “the social positioning of the *self* and *other* [emphasis added]” (p. 586). If we are to think about identity as a social positioning, it seems logical to conclude that identity is, by nature, interactional and dependent on another being in order to function. Through this understanding, identity becomes “interactionally emergent rather than assigned in an a priori fashion” (Bucholtz & Hall, p. 587). Bucholtz and Hall also introduce

five principles that they claim are crucial to understanding identity. These five principles are defined briefly below:

The Emergence principle: challenges the notion that identity is constructed within the individual mind since identity is also constructed and enacted through interaction and discourse

The Positionality principle: “challenges another widely circulating view of identity, that it is simply a collection of broad social categories.” (p. 591)

The Indexicality principle: “concerned with the mechanism whereby identity is constituted. This mechanism, known as indexicality, is fundamental to the way in which linguistic forms are used to construct identity positions.” (p. 593)

The Relationality principle: “emphasizes identity as a relational phenomenon.” (p. 598)

The Partialness principle: challenges “the analytic drive to represent forms of social life as internally coherent.” (p. 605)

Of these five principles, the relationality principle is positioned closely with the idea that identity occurs through interaction. Bucholtz and Hall describe this principle, stating, “Identities are intersubjectively constructed through several, often overlapping, complementary relations, including similarity/difference, genuineness/artifice, and authority/delegitimacy” (p. 598). These relations situate identity and how it is constructed and enacted within the relationship between two interlocutors. In this sense, there can only be the self if there is also another, separate self to interact with. This idea can also be extended beyond the individual to include the concept of social identity. Associating with a social

group allows for constant interaction between group members, but also encourages members to view their collective identity in relation to “others” who remain outside of the group.

There exists a distinct correlation between a collective group identity and individual group members. In his research, Tajfel (1981) focuses on the psychology behind collective identity and the individuals within a group. He defines social identity, explaining that it is “that part of the individuals' self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance of that membership” (p. 255). As such, individual members retain their own “self-concept,” but their social identity is dependent on the group itself. Hardaker and McGlashan (2016) continue this discussion, distinguishing between “individual identity, or one’s self-definition as a person in one’s own right, and collective identity, or one’s self-definition as a person in relation to one’s group memberships” (p. 81). That being said, these two levels of identity are not mutually exclusive, especially when viewing identity as an interactional phenomenon. Both the individual and the collective identity are constantly influenced and constructed through instances of interaction. Moreover, the relationship between one’s individual identity and their membership to a collective identity becomes even more muddled when extended to the online sphere, where elements like anonymity and communication between groups have the potential to influence one’s identity further. Overall, it is crucial to keep in mind that identity at both the individual and the collective level remains fluid and dynamic, as are one’s memberships to collective group identities, and solely viewing identity as either “individual” or “collective” could be oversimplified to the point of fault. In fact, Hardaker and McGlashan also refer to Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) approach to identity, which, again, “privileges the

interactional level, because it is in interaction that all these resources gain social meaning” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 586).

The feminist identity serves as an example of how the relationship between the collective and the individual functions. The feminist group identity is a large and diverse social identity that is made up of individual groups members. As such, the collective group identity is enacted and maintained on the individual level through the actions and interactions of the group members. To sum this relationship up, it should be remembered that identity remains interactional, occurs simultaneously at multiple levels, and is frequently dependent on the context of an interaction or social environment. As a result of the diverse nature of the feminist identity, conflictual interactions become inevitable as individuals attempt to enact the collective identity in various ways and interact with individuals outside of the social group.

Identity construction, whether individual or social, has been related to conflict. For example, Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2014) discuss how conflict between group ideologies impacts identity construction, stating, “Ideology formation involves representations of self and others, and these in turn play a key role in social conflicts between groups” (p. 230). By positioning one’s own identity directly in relation to another, the identities in Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich’s study were formed and enacted through polarization, or the us-versus-them ideological positioning of the self (Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich). In addition, Lee (2007) describes polarization as the tendency to “endorse a more extreme position in the direction already favored by the group” (as cited in Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014, p. 232). Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich explain this polarization, saying:

The ‘us group’ is constructed through discursive strategies that emphasize its good properties and actions and mitigate its bad properties and actions. For its part, the ‘them group’ is constructed through discourse strategies that invert this evaluative scheme by emphasizing its bad properties and actions, and minimizing its good ones. (p. 230)

This explanation of polarization relates back to Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) relationality principle in its focus on and search for identical, acceptable, and/or opposing features. While an emphasis on similarity/difference is most obvious when thinking about polarization, Bucholtz and Hall also point out genuineness/artifice and authority/delegitimacy, both of which are used within groups to construct relationships based on authenticity, power, and the collective identity. For example, Blommaert and Varis (2011) discuss authenticity, describing the concept of an individual’s “enoughness” and the “particular configurations of emblematic features” (p. 147) that an individual might need in order to be deemed authentic to a certain group. Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2018) explains this further, stating, “[T]he *us*, for its mere existence, is dependent on a constitutive outside. This tension, often or potentially conflictual, is an inherent part of identity construction” (p. 123). It is crucial to keep in mind the correlation between deindividuation and online social media platforms. Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2010) discusses the nature of online impoliteness, stating, “[I]t has been argued that the new technologies do not foster public dialogue and democracy, as their advocates expected they would, but polarization of ideas” (p. 542). In this study, Garcés-Conejos Blitvich found that impolite online behavior was used “to threaten the members of the out-group’s face and show their attributes as non-desirable” (p. 543) while also emphasizing polarizing attitudes that increase solidarity of the in-group. By shifting the focus

onto instances of polarization employed by social media users, it will be possible to discover whether/how a collective group identity is constructed as a result of online conflict speech on Tumblr.

2.4 The young adult life stage: Identification and identity construction

When studying identity construction at the group level, it is crucial to first understand how a group's ideology, values, and features affect how identity is constructed, perceived, and negotiated. A relevant example to the present study is the young adult age group. According to the Pew Research Center, the majority of Tumblr users fall into the 18-29-year-old age demographic, which emphasizes the importance of young adult identity construction in this online space ("Demographics of Tumblr," 2015).

There is some debate between researchers about what to call this specific age group. Arnett (2000) began this discussion by claiming that "young adult" does not appropriately describe the 18-25-year-old age group, because many individuals within this group do not yet consider themselves to be an "adult" at all. Arnett instead proposes the term emerging adulthood as an alternative, which he describes as "neither adolescence nor young adulthood but is theoretically and empirically distinct from them both. Emerging adulthood is distinguished by relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations" (p. 469). Categorized by this independence and freedom to "explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews," (Arnett, 2000, p. 469), the concept of emerging adulthood alludes to a slower, prolonged process of becoming "adult" that can only occur after experimentation of possible life roles.

In response to Arnett (2000), Horowitz and Bromnick (2007) propose instead the term contestable adulthood to describe the age group of 18-25-year-olds. They define

contestable adulthood as “the period between adolescence and incontrovertible adulthood, when claims to adult status become matters of contention and dispute” (p. 212-213).

Horowitz and Bromnick point out that a person’s “adult” status would rarely be questioned or denied if they were middle aged, while “adult” status would never be considered at all for a small child. Instead, those who fall into the 18-25-year-old age demographic are the only age group whose adult status is regularly contested. As such, “adulthood” can only be enacted when that age identity is confirmed through interactions. In other words, while Arnett (2000) believes that an individual can claim adulthood on their own, Horowitz and Bromnick argue that other individuals have the power to either accept or reject an individual’s adult status when they fall into the “contestable adult” age demographic.

While these researchers make viable arguments for the use of their terms, neither Arnett’s (2000) nor Horowitz and Bromnick’s (2007) research accounts for the fact that reaching the status of “adult” is both an inward and outward process. Adulthood is both a choice that individuals make (whether to accept and embrace freedom and responsibility) *and also* a role that must be asserted and negotiated through interaction with others. It is for this reason that, for the purposes of this research, the life stage between 18-25 years old will be referred to as “young adults,” a term which I believe appropriately encompasses the complexity of this life stage.

Through the complex discussion of deciding what to call the young adult age group, it is possible to understand that this life stage is more than just a transitory time period, but, as Arnett (2000) explained, a “period characterized by change and exploration for most people, as they examine the life possibilities open to them and gradually arrive at more enduring choices in love, work, and worldviews” (p. 479). It would come as no surprise, then, that this

stage of life would also bring with it unique and crucial aspects to identity construction.

There have been several studies that ultimately found that there are a variety of factors that influence how young adults come to view themselves as adults and what it means to “be an adult” in a modern society (Arnett, 2000; Horowitz and Bromnick, 2007; King, 2012).

Predictably, Arnett (2000) found in his study that identity is impacted most for young adults because of their freedom for “identity explorations.” He elaborates, claiming, “Identity formation involves trying out various life possibilities and gradually moving toward making enduring decisions” (p. 473). For Arnett, the changing expectations (both individual and societal) that young adults endure during this life stage allow them the freedom to attempt and experience a range of different identity factors, such as work positions or potential romantic partners, that will ultimately shape who they see themselves to be.

For their part, Horowitz and Bromnick (2007) focused not on the nature of the life stage itself, but on the markers and values that are emphasized by those who are members of the young adult social identity. In their study, they asked young adults to complete sentences such as “You know you’re an adult when...” and “Your parents treat you like an adult when...” (p. 214). Throughout the responses, independence was the category mentioned most frequently by young adults as a marker of adulthood. Horowitz and Bromnick included within this category responsibility, autonomy, and decision making as sub-categories (p. 216). While independence was noted most frequently, they recorded a wide variety of other themes and categories that were mentioned as well, including qualities (such as “acting like an adult” and showing respect for others), chronology (the belief that one becomes an adult when they reach a specific age), development (both physical and emotional), and resistance and expediency (a very few responses rejected more common beliefs about if/when an

individual becomes an adult). The variety and discrepancy reported by young adults creates a complex and multifaceted definition of what makes an adult and impacts how these young adults are viewed, both individually and as a larger social group.

In addition, King (2012) focuses on the discursive patterns that young adults use to define and describe “adulthood”. Through interviews conducted with young adults who took a gap year in between high school and college, King used membership categorization analysis (MCA) to discuss their age, life stage, and how their relationship with their parents evolved since reaching adulthood. King asserts that when young adults use language to discuss their life stage, they are constructing and accomplishing their age identity through discourse. In these interactions, young adults presented themselves as what King calls “candidate adults,” which is “something that could then be recognised or not by the interviewer as part of the interaction” (p. 115). King’s study yielded results that allow researchers and those interested in young adult identity construction to better understand how young adults achieve their age identities through interaction with others, and how the recognition of one’s age identity emphasizes that “age identities are interactional, intersubjective accomplishments” (p. 121). In understanding how the young adult age group uses interaction and talk to accomplish their age identity, researchers will be better prepared to study these interactions as they occur within an online space.

2.5 Feminist identification and identity construction

In addition to young adults, another social group that has gained considerable attention in terms of identity construction is the feminist identity. The definition of what it means to be “feminist” has proven to be quite dynamic as the feminist movement itself has evolved. There have been several different “waves” of feminism over the years, each focused

on specific platforms of equality and empowerment. According to Looft (2017), the first wave of feminism began in the mid-1800s and continued until 1920, focusing on abolishing slavery and gaining equal citizen rights for women (p. 894). The second wave, which lasted from 1960-1988, called for equality in education, the workplace, and reproductive rights (p. 894). Regarding the third and fourth waves, the lines between them are hazy at best, as the values and priorities of the feminist movement continue to change. While it is generally agreed upon that the third wave of feminism began in the 1980s, the recent emergence of a fourth wave is now becoming a common focus of study.

Olson et al. (2008) discuss the third wave of feminism, which they assert is characterized by the variety of different political agendas and beliefs associated with the movement (p. 106). In addition, Cook and Hasmath (2014) examine how third wave feminism differs from its predecessors, describing the third wave as a “progressive correction” in comparison to previous versions of feminism (p. 976). For Cook and Hasmath, third wave feminism is also characterized by “a ‘sex-positive’ and liberatory approach in order to differentiate itself from the perceived negativity of earlier iterations of feminism, with the intention of bringing young women back to feminism” (p. 976), as well as the concept of intersectionality. Collins (1998) explains intersectionality, stating, “As opposed to examining gender, race, class, and nation, as separate systems of oppression, intersectionality explores how these systems mutually construct one another” (p. 63). However, many agree that feminism has recently moved onto a fourth wave, beginning in 2008 (Looft, 2017). Looft explains that intersectionality remains a central feature of fourth wave feminism, but that this new wave is characterized by a “reliance and usage of technology and social media to connect and reach populations across cultural and national borders” (p. 894). If we are to

adopt this definition of the fourth wave of feminism, research connecting young adults, the feminist identity, and online discourse becomes even more necessary.

The differences between the waves of feminism are revealed through studying the discursive patterns and experiences of feminists who participated in these waves. In their study, Erchull et al. (2009) discuss the feminist identity development model, which was previously proposed by Downing and Roush (1985) and examine whether the model is still relevant for young women today as they construct their feminist identity. The original model distinguishes five separate stages that feminists move through, including passive acceptance, revelation, embeddedness-emanation, synthesis, and active commitment. Of these five stages, Erchull et al. (2009) identify synthesis as the stage that has evolved most between waves of feminists, defining it as being characterized by “integration of [an individual’s] sense of self as a female with her identity as defined outside of gender, as well as an ability to make independent choices based on personal, rather than group, values” (p. 833). Through comparing the self-reported surveys of second-wave feminists with young women who identify as feminist or non-feminist, Erchull et al. (2009) found that, regardless of age or feminist identification, the majority of the participants scored high in the synthesis stage, despite the fact that many of the young women did not report moving through the previous stages. In order to explain this discrepancy in the feminist identity development model, Erchull et al. (2009) explain, “Although Downing and Roush conceptualized this as being the penultimate stage of developing a feminist identity, it appears that many women endorse items about being strong, independent, and integrating their identity as a woman with their identity as a person without necessarily holding a feminist identity” (p. 840). Regardless of age, previous experiences, or even identification as a feminist, women today are more likely

to view themselves as strong and independent, even if they do not embrace the label or lifestyle of feminist. Erchull et al. suggest that these high scores in synthesis indicate that the synthesis stage might be a starting point for young feminists today instead of the penultimate stage of the feminist identification process.

In terms of feminist identity construction, the changing public opinion of the label “feminist” and the ongoing waves of feminism have heavily affected the feminist identity and how young adults approach it. Cook and Hasmath (2014) stated that the inclusivity and liberation of the third wave would hopefully attract young adults to the feminist movement. However, Olson et al. (2008) claim that young adults frequently avoid the label “feminist,” and instead employ a range of strategies in response to the concept itself. These researchers point to a phrase that Douglas (1995) coined, stating, “I’m not a feminist, but...” which frequently leads to an individual aligning with feminist values but resisting the label. While elaborating on this concept, Olson et al. (2008) state, “In other words, many young adults may live feminist lives and promote feminist ideals but refuse to use the label feminist” (p. 105). The reasons behind the reluctance to self-identify as a feminist stems in part from the stereotypes of feminists as being “irrational, man-hating, unfeminine, and fanatical” (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016a, as cited in Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2017, p. 784). This lingering stereotype appears to have influenced or deterred many young adults from accepting the label of feminist, despite their concordance with what the movement stands for.

However, Calder-Dawe and Gavey (2017) point out that the public perception of feminism is changing at a rapid pace. They mention the emergence of high-profile celebrities like Beyoncé and Emma Watson, both of whom have publicly identified as feminists and have inserted feminism into the dominant discourse. In addition, “Transnational feminist

campaigns challenging rape culture (SlutWalk) and sexual harassment (The Everyday Sexism Project) have attracted considerable support, and ad hoc feminist communities are proliferating online” (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2017, p. 284). Even more recently, campaigns like the MeToo movement and Time’s Up movement have encouraged victims of sexual harassment and abuse to speak out about their experiences, and a large portion of these movements have been carried out, organized, or shared on social media platforms. As the stereotypes and public perception of feminism continue to change, the acceptance of the label of feminism and the way that it is used to construct the social identity evolve as well.

In turning back to Olson et al.’s (2008) discussion of the feminist label, it is important to understand the role that labels play in identity construction. Olson et al. state, “Identity-based labels are extremely important to our sense of self as they are the symbolic means for creating and reflecting aspects of our identity” (2008, p. 105). In this sense, these labels are utilized not only as an identifying marker for others when interacting with an individual, but they also play an active role in enacting a social identity on the individual level. Calder-Dawe and Gavey (2017) mention this as well, noting in their study that their teenage participants discussed the ideals of feminism as reflective of the “real” them. They explain this, saying, “[M]ost interviewees described becoming a feminist as a consequence of inner exploration: they spoke of excavating a feminist self who was always present but not known” (p. 788). Calder-Dawe and Gavey’s findings coincide with Olson et al.’s description of the feminist label; not only is it a marker for interactions with others, but it continuously serves as an inward, constructing force in terms of identity.

While constructing the feminist identity, individuals are faced with specific challenges in how to navigate and negotiate their identity in interaction. This is especially

important when that interaction is occurring through social media, where paralinguistic features are either substituted with online affordances (such as emojis) or are altogether impossible. Blommaert and Varis (2011) introduce the concept of authenticity, describing it as the pressure to be “a ‘real’ X or Y, not a ‘fake’ or a ‘wannabe’” (p. 145). Within social media, there is also an immense amount of “how-to discourse” (Blommaert & Varis, p. 145) instructing individuals in how they can improve their authenticity in relation to a social identity. Additionally, Calder-Dawe and Gavey (2017) discuss authenticity when constructing the feminist identity. According to the teenagers that they surveyed, Calder-Dawe and Gavey found that “personal authenticity was frequently parceled together with the capacity to accept and express one’s difference from others” (p. 788). In addition, they state, “Interviewees’ accounts of feminist identification were interwoven with claims to authenticity and the concomitant values of confidence and individuality” (p. 788). The participants in this study felt that they were able to achieve authenticity at a personal level, as well as authenticity in the feminist discourse community, and that this authenticity set them apart from the public, although not in an isolating manner. Instead, the participants of this particular study viewed the feminist identity as offering “an alternative mode of visibility as feminist and an alternative mode of visibility as different from (and in opposition to) the gendered status quo” (Calder-Dawe and Gavey, 2017, p. 792). Through presenting their authentic self, the teenage participants were able to negotiate a shared identity with the feminist discourse community, while also differentiating themselves from those who were not members of the feminist social group. Moreover, the teenagers in this study were able to also include their age as an aspect of intersectionality within this discourse community.

Calder-Dawe and Gavey (2017) elaborate further on this emphasis of individuality during feminist identity construction. This individuality is culturally situated, as Calder-Dawe and Gavey point out when they state, “For some time now, social theorists have noted the rise of an authenticity ideal as part of an individualizing, subjective turn in modern western cultures” (2017, p. 783). In order to achieve authenticity, the participants in this study mention finding their “true self,” which would certainly set them apart from others since no two people are the same. However, this emphasis on the individual could, in theory, make it more difficult for young adult feminists to embrace a label or aspect of identity that belongs to a larger group. Interestingly, the teenagers in this study rejected that assumption, leading Calder-Dawe and Gavey to state, “The imbrication of feminism and authenticity enabled participants to articulate feminist identity as a form of positive difference and non-conformity” (p. 790). In choosing to identify as a feminist, these young adults felt that they were able to achieve both authenticity of their true self (accepting a label that they believed had been an aspect of their identity all along) *and* asserting their individuality (by not conforming to the dominant patriarchal discourse). Even though the feminist label is not always met with positive connotations or opinions, young adults remain open to embracing the label as long as it reflects an aspect of their identity that they have already unearthed.

Overall, the ongoing waves of feminism and changing public perception of the movement continue to impact and influence the feminist social identity. Young adults, specifically, have grown up in a culture where explicit misogyny and sexism are no longer acceptable within public discourse, but instead are perpetuated using more covert methods. Because of this, young adults may believe in feminist ideals or movements, but at times resist the formal label of “feminist” because of stereotypes or misconceptions. Alternatively,

embracing the feminist label and identity also provides young adults with a social marker and access to a collective identity that encourages authenticity and individuality. With this in mind, the next section will focus on conflict speech within online discourse, a form of interaction that could influence the construction of the young adult feminist identity.

2.6 Online discourse and conflict speech

The rise of social media and the resulting online discourse brought with it a range of different forms of interaction. As was discussed earlier, the construction of identity should be thought of as “intersubjectively rather than individually produced and interactionally emergent rather than assigned in an a priori fashion” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 587). Keeping in mind that identity is built through interaction, the new discourse communities and forms of communication that have grown in popularity online have had lasting impacts on how identity is constructed within these digital spheres. Online discourse, commonly referred to as “netspeak,” is a distinct form of communication containing unique features, conventions, expectations, and rules of interaction. As such, online interaction and the effects that it has on identity construction should continue to be studied to better understand how online discourse communities function.

One of the types of discourse that has become commonplace in online communication is conflict speech. Because platforms of social media enable communication between vast amounts of people, conflict is inevitable. Conflict tends to occur frequently within digitally-mediated communication because of the physical disconnect between interlocutors, resulting in an increased likelihood that individuals will say things that they would not say in face-to-face interactions (Hardaker & McGlashan, 2016). However, it is important to note that conflict speech does not equate to aggressive or abusive language that is frequently used

online. In fact, conflict speech should be viewed as an umbrella term under which many forms of communication and interaction can fall. Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2018) discusses conflict speech, describing it as “a more comprehensive term to refer to the gamut of problematical forms of interaction” (p. 121). Under the umbrella of conflict speech fall interactions such as disagreement, aggression, hate speech, and many other types of interactions that pose some form of a social issue. In fact, any interaction can be potentially interpreted by an interlocutor as conflictual (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2018, p. 121).

Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2018) describes conflict speech further, explaining, “Conflict involves some measure of different positionings and is not inherently negative, as it can be used to build communal life” (p. 121). The idea that conflict speech can be used to build community is especially important in an online space that does not offer the same affordances as face-to-face interactions. As was discussed earlier, polarization, or the us-versus-them ideological positioning of the self (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014), is frequently used to build a collective identity and can be extended to online spaces as well. By emphasizing the positive attributes of a group while simultaneously pointing out the negative aspects of the “others,” social media users can build a community through engaging in conflict speech while simultaneously constructing their social identity. Garcés-Conejos Blitvich’s (2010) study reflects the community-forming power of conflict, wherein impolite behavior “creates a sense of *us versus* them, which enhances in-group solidarity” (p. 543). Furthermore, the functioning of identity can also become dependent on the existence of conflict. In many cases, if conflict between groups was resolved, the polarizing effect would disappear, leaving a group’s social identity in danger of disappearing with it (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014, p. 121). All told, conflict speech frequently works to strengthen an identity by

recognizing and interacting with the “other,” thereby enhancing the social identity of the in-group.

Along the lines of polarization, Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2014) discuss the Social Model of Deindividuation (SIDE), in which “individual identity is de-emphasized, and *social* identity gains salience” (Reicher, Spears, and Postmes, 1995, as cited in Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014). As such, SIDE claims that social media users engaged in interaction will be more likely to emphasize their “social or collective identity” when they are involved in discourse within a larger community. Deindividuation is frequently associated with a loss of the individual self. As mentioned previously, Hardaker and McGlashan (2016) define deindividuation as “a sense of impunity, loss of self-awareness, attitudinal polarisation, and a likelihood of acting upon normally inhibited impulses” (p. 82). SIDE deals directly with polarization because social media users are more likely to point out the negative aspects of the “other” and emphasize the positive aspects of their collective identity if they are deemphasizing their individual self. As such, conflict speech is a frequent result of both SIDE and polarization because “beliefs, attributes and practices associated with the out-group tend to be categorically rejected” (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014, p. 232), resulting in conflict between the in-group and the out-group.

Furthermore, it is possible to understand how SIDE and polarization operate within online discourse by studying the process of selective dissociation. In her study of the Latino community, Garcia-Bedolla (2003) introduces selective dissociation, describing it as “the selective distancing of themselves away from the sectors of community that they see as to blame for this negative attribution” (p. 266). Thus, selective dissociation affects a group’s

identity negatively because it creates tension between group members, but it also represents efforts to improve the public perception of a group's social identity (Garcia-Bedolla, 2003). While Garcia-Bedolla discusses selective dissociation in relation to ethnic identity, it can be extended to other social identities as well. Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2014) point out the use of selective dissociation while analyzing online language aggression towards women. For example, while examining one man's online comment, Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich point out that that he identifies the "in-group" as men who do not abuse women, while excluding "from their definition of this identity those *bumpkins* that they see as contributing to a negative image of their group" (p. 240). By extending selective dissociation to also involve gender identities, researchers are able to study how interlocutors engage in online discourse to emphasize the positive attributes of their group not only through polarization, but also through alienating members of the group who do not represent their group identity positively.

In addition, Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2014) also mention the use of lexicalization in their study of online language aggression towards women. They describe how one social media user utilized words such as "feminazis" as a way to mark feminists as the out-group while also placing blame onto women by marking them as the oppressors. They explain lexicalization in this instance, stating that it "clearly reveals gender ideologies in discourse" (p. 242). The lexical choices made by social media users during online interaction can frequently mark conflict speech, while also emphasizing the polarizing efforts made by group members in discourse.

The use of lexicalization to identify or marginalize the out-group is similar to another process termed "defensive othering". According to Anderson and Cermele (2014), defensive

othering is defined as “the process of using language to position the speaker as superior or non-deviant” (p. 279). Similarly to Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich’s (2014) study, defensive othering uses polarizing tactics in order to justify conflict speech and emphasize an us-versus-them group identity. Additionally, Anderson and Cermele (2014) discuss a term coined by Bonilla-Silva (2002) called “projection,” which “protects the speaker from claims of sexism or racism by claiming that women/blacks are in fact the ones discriminating against men/whites” (p. 288). Through projecting these negative identity traits onto the out-group, social media users have the ability to “position their authors as promoting equality” (p. 288) while in actuality their conflict speech is aimed towards further marginalizing the identified out-group.

In all, the devices discussed in this section are important to keep in mind when studying conflict speech. Within online discourse, the fact that any interaction can ultimately be interpreted as conflictual is crucial because it opens up the possibility of locating and analyzing a wide range of conflict speech online (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2018). Conflict speech not only builds tension between interlocutors, but it also constructs identity. Without conflict, polarization and the in-group/out-group dynamic would be impossible. Through this polarization, social groups are able to build their own collective identity, which is then enacted by individual group members through discursive strategies. While conflict does not always result in a negative interaction, there are many instances when a disagreement or problematic interaction cross into aggression or anger. This particular type of conflict speech will be discussed in the following section.

2.7 Language aggression within conflict speech

As stated in the previous section, language aggression is just one form of interaction that falls under the umbrella of conflict speech. Through examining how language aggression functions within online discourse, it is possible to better determine whether conflict speech contributes to online identity construction at the individual and group level. While conflict speech has already been described as some form of disagreement or problem within discourse, language can be considered aggressive if it is “intended to harm or injure the target” (Anderson & Cermele, 2014, p. 282). It is important to keep in mind that language aggression can be intended to harm or injure physically, as well as mentally and emotionally.

Language aggression has become commonplace in online discourse for several reasons. According to Anderson and Cermele (2014), one of these reasons is because social media communities and online discourse contain aspects of both public and private settings. In their study, Anderson and Cermele analyzed a collection of tweets and the accounts of survivors of domestic abuse in order to understand how aggressive language and gendered insults are used in both public and private environments. While the accounts of domestic abuse survivors were categorized neatly into the private discursive sphere, Twitter (and, by extension, other online discourse communities) appears to toe the line between public and private spaces. Anderson and Cermele (2014) determined that “Tweets are a *private* form of discourse in that they are authored by individuals, sometimes anonymously, and engage in the middling-style that ‘admits the possibility of plain speaking including slang and colloquialisms’ (Hall, 1995, p. 198). Yet they enter the public realm of online discourse” (p. 276). In this sense, the semi-public nature of online discourse requires social media users to either embrace “subtle strategies that construct women as weak, lesser, and other, while retaining the veneer of polite and *reasonable* discourse” (Anderson & Cermele, 2014, p. 289)

or rely on anonymity to hide their public identity within online communities (similar to the tactics used by trolls).

The act of trolling has become a very common feature within online discourse and reflects the effects of anonymity on social media (Eckert, 2018; Hardaker & McGlashan, 2016). Eckert (2018) uses Whitney Phillips' (2015) definition of trolls as "users who provoke to disrupt/derail discussions and sometimes are defined as a subculture that enjoys disruptions for the laughs" (p. 1292). In addition, Hardaker (2013) further discusses trolls' identity, explaining that "since identity is a process of construction, it makes sense to focus on the way that behaviour (trolling) constructs identity (troller)" (p. 62). Hardaker also discusses at length the importance of understanding a social media user's intention when disruption occurs, since "users may perceive trolling where none exists, and miss it when it occurs" (p. 62). Within Eckert's (2018) own study, trolls and shitstorms, or "a large number of insulting and/or outraged online comments to/about a blogger in a short period of time" (p. 1292), were found to be among the most common instances of language aggression reported by female bloggers in several countries. In their study, Hardaker and McGlashan (2016) conducted a collocation analysis of the types of terms that frequently surround the topic of sexual abuse or aggression. Of these, the term "trolls" was determined to be a "group nomination" (p. 87). Interestingly, despite trolls typically being defined by their anonymity and drive for disruption, they are still viewed as a cohesive group by other social media users. Within the Tumblr discourse community, for example, referring to another account or user as a "troll" not only marks them as a member of an out-group, but also downplays their discourse by insinuating that they are only trying to cause disruption or chaos.

While trolls represent one group of language aggressors online, other social media users employ a range of rhetorical strategies that insert aggressive or abusive language into online discourse. In his article on the media's interpretation of violence against women, Attenborough (2014) mentions four "discursive operations" coined by Coates and Wade (2004; 2007) that downplay or dismiss violence against women. These discursive operations include "concealment of violence," muddling or confusing the responsibility of the aggressor, hiding the victim's resistance to the abuse or aggression, and placing the blame solely on the victim (Attenborough, 2014, p. 185). In this sense, the perpetrators of aggression (both online and offline) attempt to frame their violence as either minimal in importance, the fault of the victim, or entirely nonexistent. Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2014) also discuss the types of discursive strategies used in response to violence or aggression towards women, identifying three main strategies, including "minimization, abuse denial and blaming" (p. 235), which align well with those mentioned by Attenborough.

In addition, Anderson and Cermele (2014) further describe the types of rhetorical strategies that language aggressors use in online discourse. They begin by stating, "The most common covert sexist strategy is verbal aggression against the target that states that she, as a woman, is not as capable as a man" (p. 286). Similarly to the tactics employed by trolls, outright aggression or verbal abuse is perhaps the most obvious of these strategies. However, Anderson and Cermele identified two other strategies in their study, including projection (which was discussed earlier) and a tendency "to position feminist critics of gender inequality as falsely claiming victimhood and as ignoring the reality that they are the weaker sex" (Ferber, 2000, as cited in Anderson & Cermele, 2014). Once again, it becomes clear that while language aggression in the form of outright abusive language is regularly used in

online discourse, there are also more covert methods of either using aggressive tactics or denying/minimizing aggressive behavior, particularly when it is directed towards women.

2.8 Patriarchal discourse in online spaces

In a patriarchal society, it comes as little surprise that the dominant patriarchal discourse overflows into online speech and interactions as well (Eckert, 2018; Anderson & Cermele, 2014; Eschler & Menking, 2018; Demirhan & Çakır-Demirhan, 2015). In her study of female bloggers' experience with online abuse, Eckert (2018) states, "Currently, the Internet remains a space that is legally, technologically, socially, and culturally constructed to allow perpetrators of online abuse, misogyny, sexism, and racism to go largely unpunished" (p. 1286). While elaborating, Eckert discusses how online discourses like geek culture and the act of trolling other users become gendered acts that "anchor the authority to speak to male bodies" and effectively reflect the patriarchal structure of western societies (p. 1283). Despite the fact that the Internet is physically separate from the offline world, patriarchal discourse and misogyny have still managed to infiltrate and dominate many digital spheres.

Eckert's (2018) idea that the masculine authority dominates online spaces is further supported by Anderson and Cermele (2014), who address the use of gendered language, particularly in the form of insults or threats, that are directed towards women by men. They state:

The use of threats of violence or kidnapping in combination with gendered insults, expressions of patriarchal control, or references to women's subordinate status suggests that violence is used by abusive male partners to reconstruct a gender binary

in which women are subservient and do not challenge men's right to behave as they wish. (p. 285)

In looking back to their discussion about the public and private nature of online discourse, these gendered insults align with the kind of conflict speech that designates women as the out-group. This allows misogynistic social media users to insert patriarchal discourse into the public sphere of online communities while downplaying the importance of social groups like feminists and minorities. Additionally, Anderson and Cermele (2014) mention a study by Goetz et al. (2005) that identifies four types of derogatory insults that abusive interlocutors frequently direct towards women. These include criticizing a woman's attractiveness, her value as a partner and intelligence, her value as a person, and her faithfulness to her partner (Goetz et al., p. 278, as cited in Anderson & Cermele, 2014). By attacking a woman's appearance, values, and fidelity, these aggressors are attempting to demean the female life to little more than how a woman can continue to serve dominant patriarchal figures.

In their article, Eschler and Menking (2018) discuss the role of starter pack memes in relation to identity construction. These researchers defined starter pack memes as "as memes consisting of one or more images accompanied by (1) titles providing commentary and/or context and (2) illustrating a prototype of a cultural artifact, member of a community, or shared experience" (p. 2). This study found that feminine gender-specific images occurred more frequently than masculine or non-gendered images (p. 8). Interestingly, Eschler and Menking noted that the starter pack memes in their corpus tended to use images depicting individual body parts for social identities that were both gendered and non-gendered (p. 8). As an example, they point to the use of high-heeled shoes or specific body parts that were used to represent women, but that these images rarely included a woman's entire body or her

face (p. 8). While this also occurred for masculine or non-gendered images, Eschler and Menking noted that starter pack memes were more likely to include a man's (rather than a woman's) face and a woman's (rather than a man's) body part as a representation of an entire social identity. To explain this, Eschler and Menking assert that these starter pack memes "are largely derived from a White, male 'default' point of view" (p. 9). This study points to the fact that the patriarchy (and, in turn, the objectifying male gaze,) are actively working within online discourse to perpetuate the patriarchal dominant discourse that occurs offline.

Finally, Demirhan and Çakır-Demirhan (2015) also discuss the role of the patriarchy online, explaining that the Internet does not exist separate from the dominant discourse, and instead that the Internet "encourages the hegemonic discourses and traditional power relations in society" (p. 308). Again, viewing online discourse as a reflection of an offline society reinforces the importance of understanding the functions of patriarchal discourse and the resulting conflictual interactions that occur. In their study, Demirhan and Çakır-Demirhan identified four categories into which instances of patriarchal discourse and misogyny occurred. These categories identify the definitions of: 1) domestic roles for women, 2) professional roles for women, 3) physical beauty for women, and 4) moral values regarding women (Demirhan & Çakır-Demirhan, 2015, p. 309). Within these categories, most of the tweets that they studied focused on the moral values and physical beauty of women. This is reminiscent of what Anderson and Cermele (2014) found in their own study and further illuminates the aspects of the female identity that the patriarchy emphasizes.

It is crucial to recognize the role that patriarchal discourse plays online. Through this understanding, researchers will better be able to comprehend how and why the young adult feminist identity is constructed within these online spaces. When insulting or degrading a

woman's appearance or morals within conflict speech, social media users continue to perpetuate offline patriarchal values within online spaces. Through understanding this patriarchal discourse, researchers may be able to better grasp how the young adult feminist identity is constructed within these spaces. One way that this can be done is through analyzing the methods and strategies that feminists use in response to aggressive or misogynistic interactions.

2.9 Feminist responses to conflict and misogyny: Discursive strategies and patterns

In understanding the reason for conflict speech online, there is a better possibility to see how social identity groups, such as young adult feminists, can individually use these kinds of interactions to construct their collective identity. In her article, Dawson (2018) reminds us that the goal of conflictual and negative remarks on social media platforms is “to generate an immediate, emotional response, a shock” (p. 7). While Dawson's study remains focused on how organizations and companies navigate online interactions, she does make a relevant statement when she claims, “Organizations in their digital presence must navigate these affordances in ways that reap the benefits of sociality...without sacrificing too much control over the interaction” (p. 4). If this statement can be extended to also include the feminist identity, the concept of maintaining control over conflictual situations could become quite important.

Eckert's (2018) study focused on how feminist bloggers in Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States responded to conflict and aggression online. In thinking about how digital spaces (such as social media or online blogging platforms) affect feminist social groups, Eckert describes technology as a “double-edged sword” for digital feminism which “not only [provides] opportunities for self-expression but also [makes] them

vulnerable to abuse” (p. 1284). In this sense, technology and online platforms have the potential to allow feminists channels of communication and activism, but the current duality within these digital spaces also forces social media users to accept the risks associated with online communication.

While interviewing several female feminist bloggers, Eckert (2018) identified a range of strategies that the participants reported in response to online conflict, aggression, and abuse. The most commonly reported strategy was exposing the abuse. For example, several of the German bloggers who participated in Eckert’s study mentioned a website that collected hateful comments submitted by bloggers. Submitting hateful or problematic comments to this site “divorces comments from the target, exposes comments in their abusiveness and ridiculousness, and potentially monetizes them” (p. 1293-1294). By appropriating the comments for their own use and exposing the commenters to an unfamiliar atmosphere, feminist bloggers felt they were able to maintain and exert control over the conflictual interaction. Removing these comments from their original context and placing them in a different environment can be referred to as “recontextualization,” or as Attenborough (2014) describes it, “the simple idea that a description of an event produced in one context is never the same as a description produced in some other context” (p. 183-184). In addition, the second most frequently-mentioned response strategy reported was a sort of buddy system, where participants reported “letting friends or fellow bloggers moderate insulting comments or sharing incidents to reaffirm they are not alone” (p. 1295). In online spaces, and particularly in those spaces where trolls and/or aggressors are more likely to be found, this buddy system becomes an interesting example of like-minded and friendly social media users showing solidarity. In instances where this solidarity is exemplified between two

feminists, these conflictual interactions build the feminist group identity while further othering the out-group, or, in this case, the language aggressor or abuser.

Aside from exposure and recruiting support, Eckert (2018) also found that feminist bloggers reported avoiding conflictual interactions through self-censorship. Eckert explains that some of the participants made the decision to “keep a ‘low profile’: not posting on hot-button topics, emphasizing facts, toning down their language, or not promoting their blog to a wider community. They removed personal information from their blogs, such as addresses and photos of their children” (p. 1295). In addition, some bloggers even reported taking a hiatus from the Internet in response to online conflict. Self-censorship and spending time offline may not sound like the most active of response strategies, but they do still allow feminist social media users a chance to maintain some level of control over the interaction.

In addition, Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2018) also discusses the response strategies used during conflictual interactions online, focusing specifically on social media users who identified within the same Latino identity group. Within her study, social media users frequently used selective dissociation during interactions involving conflict as a way to distance themselves and the in-group from others who they felt were not representing the group identity in a positive manner (p. 127). Along these same lines, Garcés-Conejos Blitvich found that the social media users in this study also responded to conflict by seeking disagreement. For example, one social media user who posted in the forum “expresses her disagreement with the stereotypes associated with Latinos and dissociates herself from the view that all Latinos are uneducated immigrants by presenting herself as a college student” (p. 126), thereby seeking disagreement while also dissociating herself from those she views as uneducated.

Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2018) also identified a four-part strategy that social media users applied when responding to online conflict. The steps involved in this strategy include:

- Somebody/their actions/thoughts, etc. would be associated with a negative aspect
- By pointing out this negative aspect, the poster would try to make that addressee feel uncomfortable
- By disagreeing with that person/action/thought, the poster would indicate a lack of common ground
- The poster would then finally dissociate themselves from that person or group (p. 130)

Garcés-Conejos Blitvich reminds us that superdiversity is a crucial concept to understand when examining the Latino group identity because the social group is so vast and complex. According to Blommaert (2013), the term “superdiversity” can be defined as “diversity within diversity” (Vertovec, 2007; 2010 as cited in Blommaert, 2013, p. 4). When dealing with a superdiverse social group, Garcés-Conejos Blitvich notes that it is more difficult for social media users to establish a shared sense of identity due to the “lack of common ground” (p. 130). Despite this, it cannot be denied that broader social identities (such as the feminist identity group) still share a collective identity. Although conflict has the potential to emphasize differences within a group identity, it still allows social media users the opportunity to discuss these differences. While disagreements may arise, conflict speech enables social media users to enact and negotiate their identity at the individual level (through strategies like selective dissociation) while also contributing to the larger identity construction of the young adult feminist group.

Overall, it becomes clear that social media users who align with the feminist identity rely on strategies and specific techniques in order to respond to instances of conflict online. Whether these strategies involve self-censorship, engaging with online aggressors, or dissociating from other group members who do not represent positive group values, online feminists have learned how to maintain a certain amount of control over conflictual interactions. Additionally, these types of conflict can result in the construction of specific discourse communities and their resulting collective identities (Hardaker & McGlashan, 2016). However, it is important to note that online interactions do not happen in a vacuum. In fact, the types of conflict that appear in online discourse can directly affect interactions and the feminist identity in the “real,” offline world as well.

2.10 Online conflict speech and the offline implications

While online discourse contains its own features, conventions, and affordances, it also has implications that extend into the offline world. It was mentioned in a previous section that the dominant patriarchal discourse of the offline world influences online discourse, allowing for cultural ideologies like misogyny and racism to “go largely unpunished” (Eckert, 2018, p. 1286). While social media platforms are reflective of offline culture, they also impact how the dominant offline discourse is conceived and constructed. In this sense, online discourse is both influenced by and an influencer of the larger offline discourse of society.

Eckert (2018) calls attention to the fact that online conflict and abuse have larger implications that reach beyond any social media site. She states, “Online abuse is often trivialized and framed as jokes” and that those who try to expose or prevent online conflict

(be it disagreement or hate speech) are frequently “dismissed as attempts to curb freedom of speech and impose censorship” (p. 1283). Indeed, the fact that abuse, threats, or acts of aggression within online discourse are typically discounted is disturbing. In her study, Eckert found that only 11.25% of her participants reported having filed complaints to the police in response to experiences where “they felt seriously threatened online or because a stalker crossed into offline harassment via phone or personal encounters” (p. 1296). Of the nine participants who went to the police, only four reported that their cases were taken seriously (p. 1296). In addition, the threat of online conflict transitioning into the offline world remained a seriously reason for why some of the female bloggers in Eckert’s study decided to self-censor or retreat from online platforms. Trinch (2014) echoes this sentiment, explaining that negative or dismissive reactions to aggression or abuse against women “are created in and constitutive of the same culture of denial that keeps people silent about sexual violence” (p. 215). Whether through silence, self-censorship, or abandonment of online platforms, the societal attitude regarding language aggression directed at women remains an issue both online and offline.

Within Eckert’s (2018) study, one blogger who filed a police report “said the police are ‘idiots’ who advised her to change her email address, blog, and Facebook account and stop writing about certain topics” (p. 1296). Within this advice, it becomes evident that, at least in this case, the police were more concerned with how the feminist blogger could change her online habits or protect herself instead of working to rectify the abuse that she endured online. The practice of placing the blame or the responsibility on victims of online abuse could explain why so few bloggers in Eckert’s study reported filing complaints with

law enforcement. In addition, online victim blaming is another instance of cultural practices online both reflecting and shaping the larger societal culture offline.

Because technological innovations and Internet discourse are relatively recent phenomenon, legal response to these types of conflictual online interactions has not yet been conceived. While hate speech and abusive language have been condemned in the public offline sphere, social media users, and women in particular, have grown accustomed to their presence within online discourse (Hardaker & McGlashen, 2016; Eckert, 2018). Eckert (2018) mentions this, stating:

Law, police, social media, and society do not yet fully acknowledge the seriousness and frequency with which women are targets of online abuse. It constitutes systematic discrimination and crime that need to be rigorously prosecuted and penalized. This includes understanding such abuse as enmeshed online and offline communication.
(p. 1297)

The invention of the Internet has brought with it a range of social media platforms that both reflect and impact the dominant offline culture within society. However, it also calls for updated laws and regulations in response to the more harmful forms of conflict speech.

2.11 The role of conflict speech within online feminist identity construction

For the purposes of this study, it is crucial to understand how conflict speech impacts identity construction for young adult feminists. Because identity is “interactionally emergent” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 587), the role of online discourse and the interactions that occur within social media platforms cannot be ignored in regard to how identity is built, negotiated, and enacted. Additionally, the role of conflict speech within online discourse

becomes an important type of interaction that influences the construction of identity for several reasons. Within a diverse social group, conflict is frequently handled through strategies such as selective dissociation or deindividuation. Between social media users belonging to different identity groups, conflict can result in a range of polarizing tactics in order to normalize or prioritize the in-group while marginalizing or dismissing the out-group.

Because online conflict speech impacts an impossibly broad audience, it is necessary to narrow the focus to a single social identity group within this study. Conflict speech is frequently aimed towards feminists (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014; Anderson & Cermele, 2014; Eckert, 2018; Attenborough, 2014; Goetz et al., 2005) and because of the complexities of this social identity this study will focus on how the feminist identity is constructed in response to conflictual interactions. As the feminist identity continues to evolve through a new fourth wave, young adult feminists are currently leading the way in understanding the implications of this fourth wave and how it will differ in comparison to previous waves. In addition, Tumblr will be the focus of this study because it contains a wide range of affordances that allow and encourage identity construction (Wargo, 2017; Oakley, 2016) and because this particular social microblogging platform contains a large percentage of young adult users and active feminist accounts (“Demographics of Tumblr,” 2015). Additionally, this study aims to establish an ethnography of the young adult feminist social identity in order to better comprehend how conflict speech impacts the identity construction of this social group in online environments.

Using the concepts discussed in this chapter, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What role does online conflict speech play in young adult feminist identity construction?
2. How do instances of conflict between two or more feminists impact identity construction?
3. How do instances of conflict between at least one feminist and at least one non-feminist impact identity construction?

In order to answer these research questions, the methodology outlined in the following section was devised.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

3.1 Data collection

The data for this study was collected on the microblogging platform Tumblr beginning on September 14, 2018 and ending on January 6, 2019. Because Tumblr has a highly active feminist community, I narrowed down the large amount of available data by identifying four active Tumblr accounts that are dedicated to creating and sharing posts related to feminist topics. Each of these accounts specifically mentions feminism in either their account name or in the bio section of their profile. For the purposes of this study, an account was considered “active” if the account shared or posted material the week before the beginning of data collection and continued to post throughout the data collection period. In an effort to maintain anonymity, these four Tumblr profiles have been assigned the following pseudonyms: Account A; Account B; Account C; Account D.

While these four accounts claim to be dedicated to feminist topics and discussion, several of them also create and share posts that relate to other social and political topics and issues (Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ issues, and current political events and occurrences, to name a few). In order to collect data that specifically relate to feminism, I limited the corpus to include only posts that contained the hashtag #feminism. As a form of metadata, hashtags allow users to “indicate the ‘aboutness’ of a post” (Zappavigna, 2014, p. 211) while also contributing to a communal discussion surrounding a topic. When social media users employ hashtags, they mark their posts, making them searchable for others interested in contributing to or reading about a discussion. The challenge with using hashtags while collecting data is that the frequency with which hashtags are included in posts varies by user. For this reason, one of the accounts used in this study presents significantly more data included in the corpus

than others. A representation of the amount of posts included in the corpus per account can be seen in Figure 1. The overrepresentation of this single account could affect the comments that were collected for this corpus because of the discrepancy of user numbers that follow each of the four accounts. For example, more users could follow Account A than Account B, resulting in an increased amount of comments on Account A's posts. However, the conflict that ensued on the 30 posts included in this data set was evenly dispersed and, as such, the conflict between interlocutors and its effects on the young adult feminist identity construction should remain unaffected.

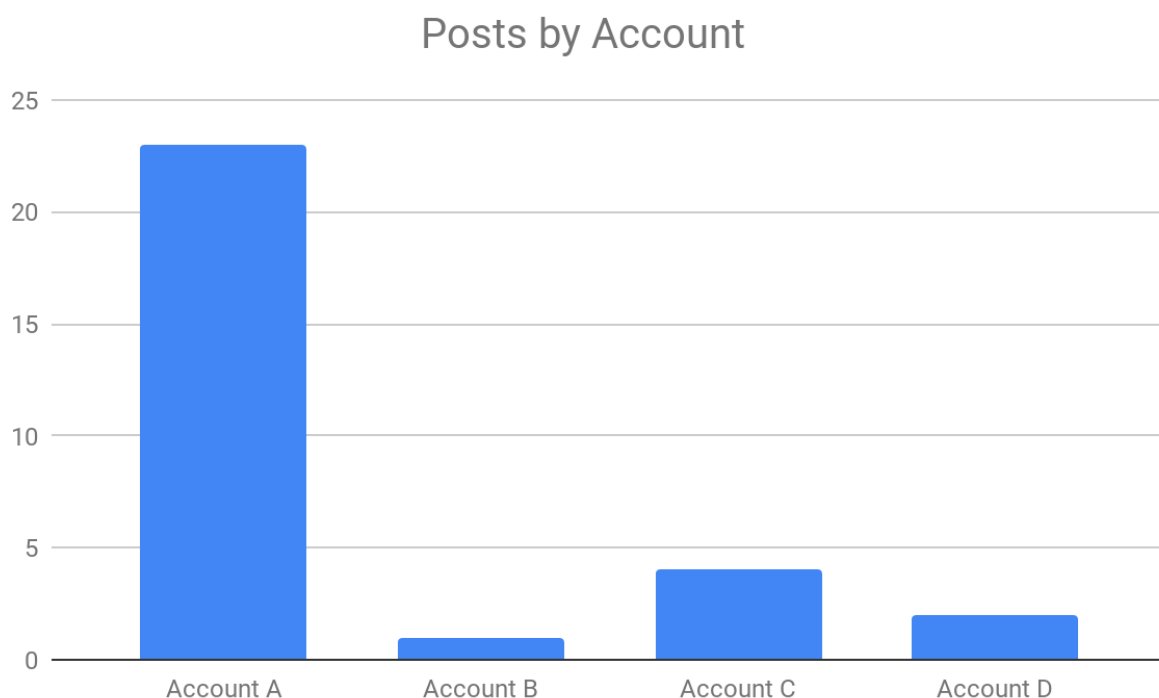


Figure 1: Posts by account

After narrowing down the eligible posts from the four accounts, I collected screenshots of the original posts using the Microsoft desktop application "Snipping Tool" in order to best present the context of the post and include all the hashtags used by the poster. In

addition, I transcribed the comments left in the “notes” section underneath each post. The Tumblr “notes” section is comprised of two kinds of interactions: likes and comments. Of these, only the comments were collected. Two of the 30 posts that were included in the corpus received over 20,000 notes; for these posts, I collected the 60 most recent comments. A total of 30 posts have been collected for this study, and the corpus of comments in response to these 30 posts equals to 471 total comments containing 12,122 words. For the comments under each post, each commenter was provided with a numerical alias instead of their Tumblr handle in order to maintain privacy. In addition, any grammatical or spelling errors within the comments included in this corpus have not been corrected in order to ensure that the analysis reflects the comments exactly as they were in the context that they were posted.

Because the analysis of the data is focused on instances of conflict between feminist and non-feminist Tumblr users, the comments included in this analytical corpus first needed to be coded in order to determine whether or not they aligned with the original post (henceforth, OP). Addressing comments that support or disagree with the OP proves to be somewhat challenging because in many instances it is difficult to determine whether a comment is being interpreted as the commenter intended. While many comments were explicit in their support or dissent of the OP, there were others that were much more unclear. Example 1 details an instance of comments that were difficult to code:



Example 1: Tumblr post

4.2: That is fucked up.

4.4: This can't be real right? What woman in Oklahoma let any man push women backwards like that! My mother would put a blade in a stupid fucker makin noises like this! A real man wouldn't allow a legislator to talk this shit!\

4.10: Men need permission from women to be fathers. The whole situation is fucked up, but since feminists only care about one side, despite claiming to care about everyone, I'm not really that shook.

4.14: Ah, Oklahoma. One of the many reasons aliens won't talk to us.

4.17: Eh, a move in the right direction but still far, far from what we need.

Example 1: Excerpt of Tumblr comments

Example 1 provides an excerpt of a variety of comments left under a single post. Commenters 4.2 and 4.4 were very clear in aligning with the OP's outrage over the topic within the post, using phrases like "That is fucked up" or "This can't be real right?" to demonstrate that they share similar views with the OP, thereby aligning themselves with the feminist identity. On the other hand, Commenter 4.10 is very clear in disagreeing with the OP, especially because this user is referring to "feminists" as the out-group. However, while some comments are easy to code for support/disagreement, others, like those left by Commenter 4.14 and 4.17 are more difficult to determine. Some of the comments in the corpus (like the contribution by Commenter 4.14) were not related to the topic being discussed (in this case, aliens), and thus it was difficult to determine whether they intended to support or disagree with the OP. Additionally, comments like the one left by 4.17 attempt to provide support for either the in-group or the out-group, but the way that the comment is phrased leaves the commenter's intention unclear. While this is just a single example, it does reflect the difficulties that I encountered in attempting to code the comments for support or disagreement. It is difficult at times to determine whether a Tumblr user was attempting to align with or against the OP. However, identifying which users associated with the feminist identity was made much easier by the presence of conflictual interactions. Through recognizing instances of conflict in the comments section, I was able to better determine which users were aligning themselves with the OP (and thereby aligning themselves with the feminist social identity since all of the posts were related to feminism) because they tended to engage in conflictual interactions with those users who did not align with the feminist identity or support the OP.

Through combining my familiarity with netspeak and the context of the post and comments, I determined that approximately 19% of the 471 total comments directly disagreed or withheld support from the OP, while 32% of the comments directly agreed with or showed support for the OP. Figure 2 provides a display of these comments.

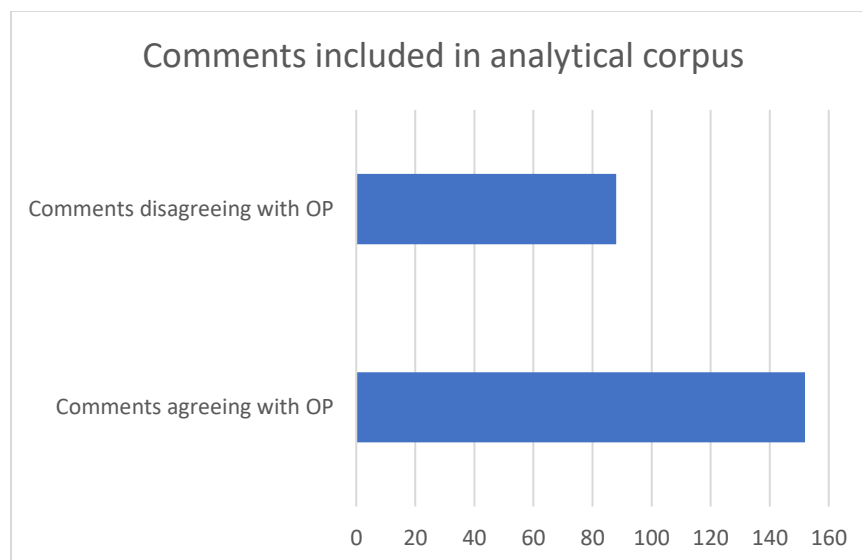


Figure 2: Comments included in analytical corpus

The remaining comments not included in these numbers were either unclear in their support (or lack thereof) or were entirely off topic, and thus it could not be clearly determined whether they were intended to agree or disagree with the OP. However, these comments still provide valuable context, and many have remained in this analysis section for this reason. Additionally, the conflict that occurred in the comments section varied by post. Of the 30 posts included in this study, eight of them did not contain any conflict between users and were made up primarily of comments supporting the OP. Moreover, because the Tumblr accounts themselves were specifically dedicated to feminist issues, it is likely that most Tumblr users commenting on the content posted by the four feminist accounts will be

aware of the ideals and values of the OP. This is important to note because conflict is at the center of this study and Tumblr users who post potentially conflictual content are more likely to be aware of the cultural context surrounding this online environment.

3.2 A note on Internet research ethics

When conducting research using online interactions and posts, it is crucial to understand and abide by ethical research standards. According to the AoIR Ethics Working Committee (2012), those involved in online research should strive to uphold “the fundamental rights of human dignity, autonomy, protection, safety, maximization of benefits and minimization of harms, or, in the most recent accepted phrasing, respect for persons, justice, and beneficence” (p. 4). In addition, Page et. al (2014) reduce these basic tenets down into a single primary research principle: “Avoid harm to yourself and to others” (p. 58). While simple in nature, this principle presents several challenging questions for this particular study, especially given the evolving nature of the online world. For example, the AoIR (2012) note the issue of defining a “person” in online studies, questioning, “Is an avatar a person? Is one’s digital information an extension of the self? In the U.S. regulatory system, the primary question has been: Are we working with human subjects or not?” (p. 7). In attempting to pinpoint what constitutes a “person” in online environments, it becomes clear that simply “avoiding harm” is a complicated principle to follow.

One of the most important issues to consider when conducting online research is the matter of privacy and anonymity. As was discussed in earlier sections, Tumblr profiles tend to be anonymous; a user’s Tumblr handle rarely includes a legal name and typically does not disclose any personal information. However, the accounts and comments used in this study are all viewable by the public. The Tumblr Privacy Policy (2018) tells its users, “You can

keep yourself fairly anonymous on Tumblr, but remember that your posts, blogs, pages, and username are all visible to the public by default” (Account Information section, para. 2). The public nature of Tumblr allows for the collection of posts and comments and their inclusion in the corpus for this study. With this in mind, it is crucial to also note that “individual and cultural definitions and expectations of privacy are ambiguous, contested, and changing” (AoIR, 2012, p. 6). Including a user’s Tumblr name could still be considered a breach of privacy to the individual responsible for the account, despite the platform’s public nature. As such, I will not include the names, profile handles, or identifying information of any of the accounts.

In addition to the privacy rights of these Tumblr profiles, it is also imperative to mention this researcher’s role in this discourse community. For several years prior to this study, I have been an active member of the Tumblr community. Before beginning this study, I created a new Tumblr account that was unaffiliated with any previous posts or comments left on my personal Tumblr account. While collecting the posts and comments, I did not engage in any of the discussions under these posts in order to ensure that my own comments are not represented in this corpus. The only interaction that I had with the posts represented in this study was “liking” them when they were posted in order to easily access them later. Leaving a like on these posts had little effect on the study, given that all the posts collected received over 100 likes each. By refraining from further participation in this discourse community, this study avoids the observer’s paradox and is able to examine the comments in this data set as they occurred naturally.

3.3 Procedure and Theoretical framework

In order to address the functionality of conflict speech within online identity construction and answer the research questions presented in the previous chapter, the present study uses a mixed-methods analysis which combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches. While explaining the distinction between qualitative and quantitative approaches, Page et. al (2014) note, “In simple terms, quantitative methodologies tend to be interested in examining the phenomenon in question in a way that measures it. In contrast, qualitative methodologies are more interested in uncovering particular patterns or perspectives” (p. 50). By adopting a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative analyses, the corpus collected for this project will receive the benefits of both measurable data and an emphasis on the patterns of conflict speech within the corpus.

3.3.1 Quantitative Analysis

For this study, a quantitative analysis will allow for the ability to measure the amount of comments on a given post, compare the total comments to the amount of conflictual comments and/or interactions, and measure particular lexical items that mark an instance of conflict. As Page et. al (2014) explain, a quantitative analysis provides researchers the ability “to trace overarching trends which relate to macro-level perspectives” (p. 51). Analyzing the findings of this study using a larger, macro-level lens will also contribute to establishing an ethnography of the young adult feminist identity, which makes up another portion of the framework for this research. While this study prioritizes a qualitative approach, the benefits of a quantitative analysis are too important to overlook in order to address the specific research questions for this study.

For example, coding the data included in the analytical corpus was made easier by employing a quantitative approach because there exists such a large percentage of comments

that could not be coded neatly into either agreeing or disagreeing with the OP. In viewing this through a quantitative, macro-level lens, it becomes clear that identifying instances of conflict or support is not as simple as one might expect in online discourse. As such, answering Research Question 1 (What role does online conflict speech play in young adult feminist identity construction?) becomes even more complicated because simply determining what should be considered “conflict” is a difficult task. However, while viewing the data quantitatively illuminated this issue, it was easier to later solve this particular difficulty during the qualitative analysis.

In addition, the quantitative lens was particularly useful when employing a thematic analysis to the data. According to Clarke and Braun (2017), a thematic analysis is described as “a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning” (p. 297). While a thematic analysis is normally employed primarily within qualitative approaches, it also yields insight while examining data quantitatively. Having coded the data for instances of conflict, support, and disagreement, several recurring themes continued to appear, particularly in relation to conflictual interactions. As such, it became clear that a close analysis of how these themes functioned within interactions was necessary in order to address the research questions linking conflict with identity construction. However, before I was able to analyze these themes, I needed to first examine them quantitatively in order to determine how frequently they were used within the data. Again, this offers a macro-level perspective in terms of how these themes functioned within the larger collection of data, while the thematic analysis provided insight into how the themes related to conflict and identity construction on a closer, micro-level of interaction.

3.3.2 Qualitative Analysis

While both the qualitative and the quantitative approaches bring with them a series of benefits that can improve the accessibility of data that has been collected, the analysis in this study will be eminently qualitative because of the specific research questions presented and the goals of this research project. A qualitative approach, for example, provides the freedom to explore the organization of certain posts and the subsequent comments, whether interlocutors establish their positioning within or distance themselves from a social group identity, and the choices made within interactions that reveal if/how this social identity is constructed in response to conflict. A qualitative analysis and an emphasis on recurring patterns and discursive themes will better allow me to answer the three research questions noted in Chapter 2, which intend to determine if conflict is linked to young adult feminist identity construction and, if so, how this conflict functions within interactions.

In viewing conflict through a qualitative lens, this study utilizes Culpeper's (1996) framework of impoliteness and impoliteness strategies (see Appendix A). Culpeper, who pulls extensively from previously established politeness frameworks (for example, Brown and Levinson's (1987)), explains that impoliteness is "the use of strategies that are designed to have the opposite effect [of politeness strategies] – that of social disruption" (p. 350). Thus, Culpeper constructs a framework of impoliteness, including five superstrategies of impoliteness and a range of impoliteness strategies that are frequently employed in order to achieve these superstrategies. Within these impoliteness strategies, several are important for this study and can easily align with conflict speech, including seeking disagreement, dissociation, calling an interlocutor derogatory names, and to "condescend, scorn, or ridicule" (Culpeper, 1996, p. 358). Moreover, since Culpeper originally published his 1996 framework, several modifications have been proposed to adapt the framework and the

functionality of impoliteness in discourse. Of these adaptations is Culpeper et. al (2003), who suggest that the five superstrategies in the original framework occur in combination with one another rather than individually. In addition, Culpeper (2016) modifies the original framework further by providing a bottom-up model of impoliteness strategies (see Appendix B). Through adopting Culpeper's (1996) original impoliteness framework and the modifications that have been proposed since its publication, this study is able to better understand how conflict functions in regard to politeness/impoliteness and the impoliteness strategies that are common within conflictual interactions.

This study also aims to establish an ethnography of how the young adult feminist identity is constructed. As Dich (2016) explains, "The goal of ethnographic research is to make sense of a specific culture in order to better understand members' behaviors, actions, and beliefs" (Bishop, 1999 as cited in Dich, 2016). A major focus in carrying out an ethnography of the young adult feminist identity was to discover the functionality of conflict while constructing a diverse collective identity. As was mentioned previously, the feminist social identity continues to evolve over time, and young adults today approach feminism and the collective identity differently than previous generations. Connected through the Internet, sites like Tumblr allow for young adult feminists to engage with other feminist Tumblr users (who align with the in-group) and non-feminist Tumblr users (who are viewed as the out-group). In this sense, conflict occurring within the feminist social group and with the "others" outside of the group has the potential to yield insight into how the feminist identity is constructed by young adults in the present. Utilizing an ethnographic approach in this research has the potential to relate the functionality of conflict in the identity construction of this particular social identity to the offline world as well.

From an ethnographic perspective, the online interactions represented in this data set contain a distinct range of digital features and affordances, all which combine to create a specific cultural context. Within each post and the resulting comments in this collection of data, there is a strong connection to feminist culture, which advocates for equality of the sexes, gender equality, and female empowerment. The priorities and beliefs of the feminist culture make up a large portion of the context online. For example, the posts that make up the corpus for this research were centered on feminist issues, topics, and discussions. As such, understanding the context surrounding such topics within this specific discourse community is imperative when discussing the functionality of conflictual interactions. Through understanding the feminist cultural context that is prominent within these Tumblr posts, I aim to better comprehend the decisions and word choices used within an interaction and how it is received by other interlocutors.

As Page et. al (2014) explain, another characteristic of using an ethnographic approach is “to see people’s perspectives in any situation and so to provide an insider’s view” (p. 108). Through adopting an insider’s perspective (or the “emic” perspective), researchers can obtain “an interest in the sense-making and theorising of participants, and in turn how this is framed by the culture in which people are located” (Page et al., 2014, p. 108). Ultimately, including the personal perspectives of the interlocutors involved in an interaction can also provide insight into the larger cultural context, both online and offline. Ethnographic approaches to this research will not only provide a deeper understanding of how conflict functions within online identity construction but will also relate these findings to the broader offline culture.

Through a qualitative lens, this study will also employ a close discourse analysis that focuses on the language use during interactions while including in the analysis digital affordances like emojis, images, and quotations that affect the social meaning within the context. With the goal of establishing an ethnography of the young adult feminist identity, discourse analysis allows for a better understanding of “the social meanings that are made in texts through close analysis of the language used” (Page et. al, 2014, p. 94) while also relating these social meanings to the larger scope of the young adult feminist identity as a whole. In addition, the thematic analysis discussed previously goes along neatly with discourse analysis because analyzing the recurring themes allows this researcher to identify and better understand the discursive strategies and patterns that Tumblr users employ during instances of online conflict.

Finally, for the purposes of this study, I employ a social constructionist approach which, as Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2014) explain, “is based on the premise that identity is something that those involved in social activities *do* and that in the course of these doing – or performative – practices they ‘align with or distance themselves from social categories of belonging depending on the local context of interaction’” (De Fina 2006, as cited in Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014, p. 232-233). Using a social constructionist approach aligns neatly with Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) assertion that identity is “interactionally emergent rather than assigned in an a priori fashion” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 587). In this sense, the qualitative analysis for this study combines this social constructionist approach with Culpeper’s (1996) framework of impoliteness and intends to implement a close discourse analysis and thematic analysis in order to discover whether the data in this analytical corpus link conflict speech to online identity construction of the young

adult feminist social group and to determine how this conflict functions during instances of identity construction. The following chapter presents this analysis and discusses the themes and functionality of conflict speech during a number of interactions on Tumblr.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS – RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis and discussion included in this chapter will be divided into three parts in order to address the research questions listed in Chapter 2. The first section (4.1) will discuss the common themes that emerge within the corpus of comments collected. The second section (4.2) will focus on understanding the functionality of conflict speech during interactions between a Tumblr user who aligns with the feminist social group and agrees with the OP and a user who does not align with the feminist social group and does not agree with the OP. Finally, the third section (4.3) will examine the role of conflict between two users who are both group members of the feminist social identity, but who engage in conflict in relation to the OP. With the goal of understanding how this conflict speech affects the young adult feminist identity, this analysis will reflect the complexities behind this collective identity and the role that it plays in the Tumblr discourse community. It should be noted that, within the context of this analysis, the “in-group” will refer to the feminist social group, while the “out-group” will refer to those outside of the feminist social group.

4.1 Common themes within conflictual interactions

As previously mentioned, the Tumblr profiles included in this study focus specifically on feminist issues and mention feminism in either their handle names or in the bio section of their profiles. Moreover, while many of the users following these feminist Tumblr profiles do post comments supporting the OP, there are a number of users who do not agree with the content posted but follow these feminist profiles for the sole purpose of posting their dissent in the comments section. As such, the conflict that predictably occurs between the commenters ranges from simple disagreements to outright aggressive speech and the social media users represented in this corpus relied on a myriad of discursive strategies to navigate

their conflictual interactions. By carrying out a thematic analysis, I was able to identify several recurring themes that appeared in the analytical corpus of comments and impacted how conflictual interactions were delivered and received by Tumblr users.

4.1.1 Recontextualization of comments

One of the most frequently utilized response strategies during the conflictual interactions between feminists and non-feminists was the recontextualization of previous comments through quotation marks. Recontextualization was briefly discussed in Chapter 2 but can be defined as “the simple idea that a description of an event produced in one context is never the same as a description produced in some other context. As soon as, for example, an incident of alleged violence is reported in a newspaper article it is already recontextualised in the discourse and images of that article” (Attenborough, 2014, pp. 183-184). Within his study, Attenborough discovered that reports of violence against women were frequently recontextualized in the media, resulting in a minimization or erasure of the violence. While this study does not focus on reports of violence, there was evidence in this data supporting the idea that the feminist voice is frequently recontextualized online, particularly through the use of quotation marks. According to Lampert (2013), the act of quoting is “a complex meta-linguistic act” that occurs through a two-part structure: “A specialized meta-linguistic item, now commonly referred to as a *quotative*...[and] a linguistic representation of a previous speech event, the quotation itself, which may or may not be a verbatim report of what another or the current speaker has said in a prior context” (p. 46). In this corpus, the majority of the quotations employed utilized the quotation mark as the quotative, although one instance of quotation used a colon instead (see Example 2). Tumblr users engaged in recontextualizing their fellow users’ comments when they reinterpret them through quotes and effectively

appropriate the other commenter's voice. With a total of 471 comments included in the corpus, 60 of these comments included an attempt at recontextualization through quotation marks. A representation of the amount of recontextualizing quotations used in the corpus can be seen in Figure 3 as they appeared in each of the 30 posts:

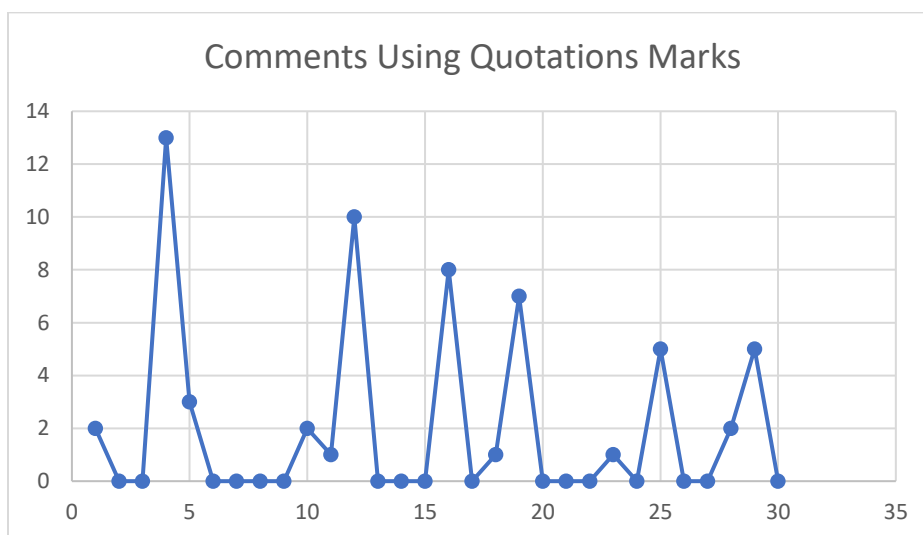


Figure 3: Comments using quotation marks

Indeed, it is worth noting that the recontextualization that occurred in the comments section tended to focus on recontextualizing another Tumblr user's voice, rather than the specific words used in a comment. In fact, a pattern emerged detailing the recontextualization of the collective "voice" of the feminist social identity rather than the "verbatim report" (Lampert, 2013, p. 46) that was previously posted. Schultze and Bytwerk (2012) discuss what they call "literary fabrication," or the practice of "intentionally misattributing written words to a particular persons and institutions" (p. 217). In their discussion, these researchers found that the practice of de-contextualizing and/or ascribing a quote to an incorrect speaker has always been a common occurrence but is especially frequent in online discourse (p. 224).

The quotations used in this analytical corpus consistently displayed this habit. As an example, see the following post and subsequent comments in Example 2:



Example 2: Tumblr post

16.11 reblogs OP: Feminists: Women wear make up to make themselves attractive to men!

Men need to learn to love women's natural look!

16.12: Feminists scream that the patriarchy forces women to painy their faces

16.13: I love how we went from "makeup is a tool of the patriarchy" to shitting on dudes who say they think women look better without makeup/

16.14: No.. like you don't get it. My male boss requires me to wear makeup to work every day. My father once told me to go put make up on my face so I would feel better. I am expected to purchase and apply makeup when I attend meetings, job interveiws or even go to church. When I am bare faced I am questioned about my mental and physical health from men. "Did you sleep last night?" "Are you feeling ok?" "Did you just wake up?"

Example 2: Excerpt of Tumblr comments

In Example 2, the comments included in this excerpt use several quotations for a variety of reasons. For instance, Commenter 16.11's use of the colon is intended to convey that the entire feminist group, which is explicitly named in this comment, uses the argument that men should appreciate a woman's "natural look," and yet the OP claims that a man's opinion is irrelevant when it comes to physical appearances like makeup. In this sense, Commenter 16.11 is recontextualizing the OP's argument entirely by appropriating the feminist voice and attempting to redirect the message conveyed, ultimately seeking to undermine the validity of the OP. This recontextualization of the feminist voice also employs the negative impoliteness strategy "explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect" (p. 358) that was proposed in Culpeper's (1996) framework of impoliteness. In addition, Commenter 16.13 approaches this post in a similar manner, using quotation marks to recontextualize the feminist argument that "makeup is a tool of the patriarchy," which this commenter believes is negated by the content posted by the OP. Commenters 16.11 and 16.13 both use similar tactics to appropriate and recontextualize the feminist voice in reaction to the OP, despite the fact that the words included in their quotations were never literally uttered in response to this post.

In addition, Commenter 16.14 also uses quotes as a way to convey their intent. In this case, they are disagreeing with commenters who criticize the OP, explaining, "No..[sic] like you don't get it." This commenter uses quotes to elaborate on the types of questions frequently directed towards women who do not wear makeup, which appear to question the woman's health and energy level. In response to Commenter 16.11's recontextualization of the feminist voice, Commenter 16.14 reclaims the collective identity by dismissing the dissenting comment entirely with the phrase "like you don't get it" and instead using

hypothetical questions within quotation marks to represent the questions that women who are not wearing makeup are frequently asked. Moreover, Commenter 16.14 utilizes the positive impoliteness strategy “exclude the other from an activity” (Culpeper, 1996, p. 357) in order to emphasize the fact that those who oppose the OP simply have not experienced the topic at hand and therefore are excluded from fully comprehending this occurrence. Ultimately, Commenter 16.14 supports the OP by insinuating that those who do not agree simply do not understand or have not lived through the experience that is being discussed.

Again, it is crucial to note that, in this context, the use of quotes does not always mean that the quotes will actually contain words that were previously posted. In fact, the vast majority of the quotes displayed in this corpus were not quoting the words of their fellow social media users, but instead tended to lean towards recontextualizing the voices of the other speakers using a sarcastic tone. In his framework of impoliteness, Culpeper (1996) describes sarcasm or “mock politeness” (p. 356) as an impoliteness superstrategy, which is directed primarily towards attacking one’s face. Several of the quotations in this corpus implemented sarcasm with the similar goal of attacking the face of their interlocutor. Take, for instance, Example 3:



Example 3: Tumblr post

4.28: “It’s all about equality guys uwu :))))”“Actually, men don’t get to have a say in whether i murder his child or not”You people are fucking disgusting

4.29: Annah can decide whether her own body, organs and tissues can or cannot be used by another person - even if said other person is a fetus. But she cannot decide whether Bella’s body or Charlie’s body can be used by third parties. Alex can decide whether his own body, organs and tissues can or cannot be used by another person - even if said other person is a fetus. But he cannot decide whether Bob’s body or Carla’s body can be used by third parties. The only person who gets to decide who uses...

Example 3: Excerpt of Tumblr comments

In Example 3, Commenter 4.28 appropriates the OP's voice, similarly to Commenter 16.11 in Example 2, but in this case Commenter 4.28 uses a sarcastic tone to undermine the feminist voice being represented. Again, Culpeper's (1996) discussion pinpoints sarcasm as one of the five superstrategies of impoliteness, stating, "The [face-threatening act] is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere" (p. 356). Culpeper et. al (2003) modified this original framework, emphasizing not just the speaker in instances of impoliteness, but incorporating the hearer's perception of impoliteness as well. The relationship between the speaker and the hearer was further complicated by Dobs and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2013), who discuss the role of the "face-threat witness," which can be defined as "any participant, ratified or un-ratified who witnesses the initial [face-threatening act]" (p. 113). While examining the use of quotations in the Tumblr comments section, the use of sarcasm combined with rectontextualizing a collective voice involves the speaker, the hearer, and those who witness the impoliteness act, but may or may not react to it. That being said, employing sarcastic quotations also allows these Tumblr users to interactionally display whether or not they align with the OP and those who associate with the feminist identity. In this sense, Commenter 4.28 uses the quoted text sarcastically with the intent of clearly dismissing the OP's argument entirely. However, the quote used to represent the feminist voice does not align with the OP but has instead been fabricated by the commenter in order to highlight what this commenter feels is a contradictory argument. In response, Commenter 4.29 posts a series of hypothetical situations in the attempt to reiterate the message of the OP and resist Commenter 4.28's recontextualization.

Interestingly, in both Example 2 and 3, the use of quotations to recontextualize the feminist voice did not dissuade other commenters from showing their support for the OP.

Instead, commenters who agreed with the post responded to this criticism by providing additional information and examples that add onto the OP. Commenter 16.14 minimizes Commenter 16.11's appropriating of the feminist voice first by stating that they "don't get it" before elaborating on their own personal experiences with the issue at hand. Additionally, Commenter 4.29 responds similarly in their comment with hypothetical examples regarding the power of choice that "Annah" or "Alex" can claim over their own body. These two responses align with the impoliteness strategies that Culpeper (1996) discusses, namely speaking condescendingly within an interaction in order to "belittle the other" (p. 358).

The theme of recontextualization that emerged in this corpus differs slightly from Attenborough's (2014) definition in that these Tumblr users are not necessarily describing an "event" (p. 183). However, by extending the concept of recontextualization to a retelling or description of a larger voice, it becomes clear that the feminist voice is frequently appropriated for the use of the out-group. Moreover, the theme of recontextualization aligns with Culpeper's (1996) framework of impoliteness because there is an imbalance of power between interlocutors, leading to a decline in motivation to engage in polite discourse (p. 354). The instances of conflict in this section reflect the social and power dynamics that appear between the Tumblr users and a struggle to maintain power and control over the conflictual interaction. While appropriating the feminist "voice" through conflict speech is a show of power, the responses posted by Commenters 16.14 and 4.29 reflect an effort to resist the recontextualization of the collective feminist voice, and ultimately represent attempts to further construct the feminist social identity through engaging in interactions about feminist topics.

4.1.2 Hashtags

Another theme that appeared in the comments collected for this study was the use of hashtags. The inclusion of one or more hashtags within a comment only occurred three times throughout the corpus, but the context and timing of these hashtags are important to discuss because of how they impacted the larger conversation. While the use of hashtags might initially seem like an obvious strategy given the popularity of hashtags in online discourse, their existence in the comments section reveals a step beyond simply marking a post. As Zappavigna (2014) explains, hashtags function as “a form of metadata that can be used to indicate the ‘aboutness’ of a post but...they also play a role in performing identity” (p. 211). While the hashtags used in a post can certainly indicate a marking of the post’s “aboutness,” the use of hashtags in the comments section points to an explicit instance of identity construction for the interlocutors because they are able to actively participate in performing their identity through utilizing this form of metadata. In addition, the hashtags employed in the comments section frequently marked very clear instances of conflict or support and tended to vary in their goal. As an example of how hashtags function within this data set, consider Example 4:



Example 4: Tumblr post

1.1: Here's how it is, every nation in the world has committed atrocities black white and brown when is everybody just going to get over the past and look at the future

1.2: @Commenter 1.1 We're talking about the present, supergenius. What, are we supposed to get over things that haven' even happened yet?

1.1: @Commenter 1.2 I love how you liberals Go straight to the name-calling. So now why would I listen to you

1.2: @Commenter 1.1 Apparently, "supergenius" is name-calling now. And you didn't answer my question. We're talking about the present. Are we supposed to get over it?

1.1: @Commenter 1.2 yes

1.1: You didn't answer my question are you a socialist

1.1: Whining and crying throughout history going to make things any better? Am I whining and crying about my ancestors being enslaved and killed? Or being profiled? Do you just assume that I'm white? Do you not realize I am a minority

1.1: He is a great point. You're not entitled to healthcare, it's not a right of life if you want good health care you have to get it yourself. It's not the governments job to take care of you don't want to get pregnant? Don't have sex. Pretty easy

1.1: Need birth-control pills? Go to your doctor it's not the governments job(again) to pay for it

1.1: Also very confused with the double standard is, men don't get any healthcare for free. Even if they go to the free clinic they still end up paying for it.

1.1: #FeminismIsBullshit #FeminismIsNotEqualRights

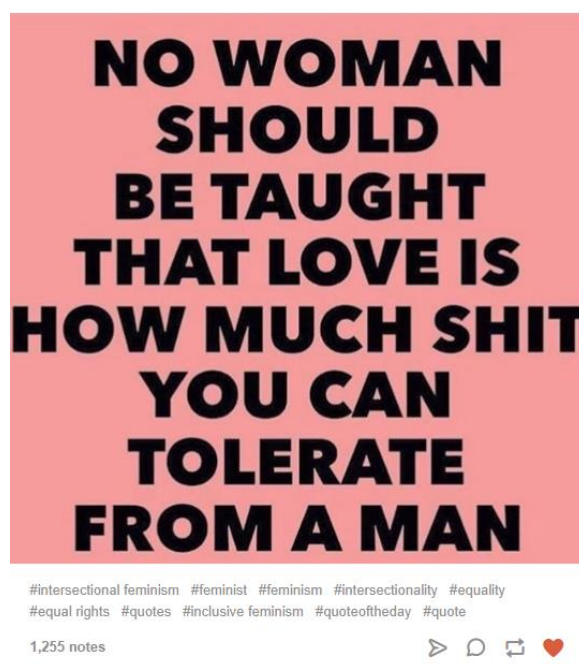
Example 4: Excerpt of Tumblr comments

In this example, Commenter 1.1 uses two hashtags in response to the OP and a resulting conflictual interaction with another commenter. In fact, the two hashtags included in this comment mark the end of a string of comments left by Commenter 1.1, which continued even after Commenter 1.2 ceased to respond. This utilization of hashtags also combines the conflict strategies “use taboo words” and “condescend, scorn, or ridicule” (Culpeper, 1996, p. 358) in order to very clearly mark this comment as conflictual. In this sense, it becomes clear that Commenter 1.1 did not employ these hashtags in order to mark the comment’s “aboutness,” but instead to mark the end of a rant with hashtags that sum up the commenter’s views on feminism as an entire movement through a combination of impoliteness strategies.

Moreover, it is unlikely that Commenter 1.1 used these two hashtags for the purpose of searchability. Again, as Zappavigna (2015) mentions, hashtags allow social media users “to search social media discourse, supporting forms of ambient communion that arise out of the ability to find what other people are talking about in quasi-‘real-time’” (p. 274). However, these two hashtags employed by Commenter 1.1 are so specific that the likelihood of another Tumblr user searching for “#FeminismIsBullshit” is improbable. The use of these hashtags does alternatively allow Commenter 1.1 to “commune affiliation” with like-minded users, in which they can “align around particular values even without directly interacting” (Zappavigna & Martin, 2018, p. 5). In this sense, these hashtags function within this conflictual interaction as a method of positioning Commenter 1.1 against the OP and other Tumblr users who associate with the feminist social group, while forming a bond with any users who agree with the content included in Commenter 1.1’s comments. In addition, these hashtags put this commenter’s stamp of disapproval on the OP and stand as Commenter 1.1’s

final words. In keeping with Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) view of identity as "interactionally emergent" (p. 587), the use of hashtags within this conflictual interaction also allows Commenter 1.1 to strengthen their alignment with the out-group and commune affiliation with other Tumblr users who do not align with the feminist identity.

While Example 4 reflects the functionality of hashtags within conflictual interactions, social media user's ability to "commune affiliation" (Zappavigna & Martin, 2018, p. 5) through hashtags can also be used as a means of supporting the OP. For instance, see Example 5:




Example 5: Tumblr post

23.1: and vice versa!

23.2: & vice versa, I guess. I dont know, just guess.

23.3: This is why feminism isn't about equality between the sexes (despite the feminist talk). If it was, this meme would read "person" instead of "woman" and "partner" instead of "man".

23.4: because it's not. um if they treat u like  ... just leave. Don't waste time. Biggest lesson learned UHBYE

23.5: #truth

Example 5: Excerpt of Tumblr comments

In this example, the OP receives a mixture of comments that agree and disagree with the content. However, Commenter 23.5 responds to the post with the hashtag “#truth” in order to establish their affiliation with the OP and the other commenters who support the post. This utilization of the hashtag feature also builds the feminist social identity. Zappavigna (2011; 2014) describes the use of hashtags in online discourse as building an “ambient identity.” She explains, “This form of online fellowship is ‘ambient’ in the sense that it does not necessarily presume direct interaction between participants (Zappavigna, 2011 as cited by Zappavigna, 2014, p. 211). In fact, Zappavigna (2014) points out that ambient identity is built because social media users engage in discourse that occurs simultaneously. In this sense, Commenter 23.5’s use of the hashtag “#truth” could have been left at the same time as, for example, Commenter 23.3’s disagreement with the OP. However, the feminist identity is constructed through Commenter 23.5’s hashtag because it allows other users to “align around particular values even without directly interacting” (Zappavigna & Martin, 2018, p. 5). In Commenter 23.5’s response, the hashtag is not employed for reasons of searchability (it is unlikely Tumblr users would search for #truth since it would yield such a wide variety of results and topics), but instead this comment reflects Commenter 23.5’s efforts to increase solidarity with other feminist users reading the comments and aid in strengthening the feminist social identity.

Overall, this analysis has found that hashtags serve several purposes in terms of identity construction. While they have recently been studied extensively because of their relation to metadata (Zappavigna, 2014), this study notes that the use of hashtags as metadata (or as a marker of the content of a post in order for it to be found by other users) was largely restricted to posts shared by individual Tumblr profiles. In fact, it was through searching for the hashtag “#feminism” that the posts included in this corpus were found. However, hashtags that were included in the comments section served a different purpose, focusing less on searchability or marking the content of the comment. Instead, the hashtags in this corpus ultimately aided in constructing the identity of either the collective feminist group through interacting with and showing support for fellow group members or marking instances of conflict speech using impoliteness strategies like “condescend, scorn or ridicule” (Culpeper, 1996, p. 358) in the attempt to undermine or minimize the post and/or comments left by feminist Tumblr users.

4.1.3 Name-calling

Finally, the comments in this corpus also frequently included forms of name-calling, in which interlocutors directly address other commenters and typically involve using derogatory or offensive terms and is specifically mentioned as a positive impoliteness strategy within Culpeper’s (1996) impoliteness framework. The tendency to participate in name-calling has become a common practice in online spaces and is a staple in conflict speech because of the physical disconnect and potential for anonymity between social media users (Hardaker & McGlashan, 2016; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2010). In the data collected for this study, a total of 50 comments included a form of name-calling, which can be viewed in Figure 4 as they appeared within the 30 posts:

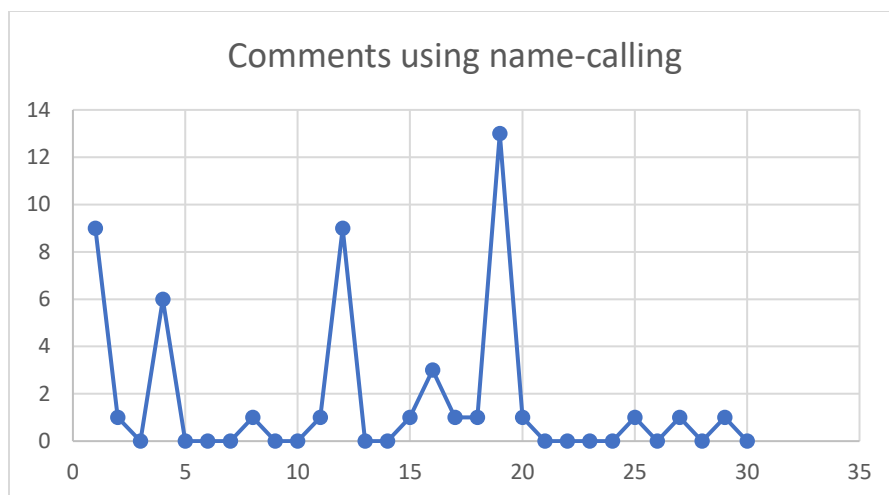


Figure 4: Comments using name-calling

As becomes apparent in Figure 4, there were several posts that contained a significantly increased amount of name-calling in comparison to other posts. This emphasis on name-calling could relate to identity construction within a space that does not allow users to physically interact with other participants. In order to discuss this further, we can turn to Example 6:



Example 6: Tumblr post

1.1: Here's how it is, every nation in the world has committed atrocities black white and brown when is everybody just going to get over the past and look at the future

1.2: @1.1 We're talking about the present, supergenius. What, are we supposed to get over things that haven' even happened yet?

1.1: @1.2 I love how you liberals Go straight to the name-calling. So now why would I listen to you

1.2: @1.1 Apparently, "supergenius" is name-calling now. And you didn't answer my question. We're talking about the present. Are we supposed to get over it?

1.1: @1.2 yes

1.1: You didn't answer my question are you a socialist

Example 6: Excerpt of Tumblr comments

Similar to the earlier discussion about the role of hashtags, Example 6 also exhibits examples of name-calling during this conflictual interaction. Commenter 1.1 begins by disagreeing with the OP, and Commenter 1.2 responds by referring to the other participant as “supergenius.” In this context, the term “supergenius” is being used in order to achieve the “sarcasm or mock politeness” superstrategy proposed by Culpeper (1996). Commenter 1.2 is not complimenting Commenter 1.1's mental capability but is instead using a hyperbolic form of address in order to draw attention to what they believe are flaws in Commenter 1.1's argument. In turn, Commenter 1.1 responds to this conflictual comment by stating, “I love how you liberals Go [sic] straight to the name-calling.” In opposition to the hyperbolic address of “supergenius,” Commenter 1.1 uses the term “liberals” as a form of name-calling, directing it at Commenter 1.2 and implying that this commenter represents a larger social group (“you liberals”) who (according to Commenter 1.1) tend to utilize name-calling as a

form of direct address. These two commenters are both clearly employing the positive impoliteness strategy “call the other names” (Culpeper, 1996, p. 358), although the context of these instances of name-calling also frequently combine “call the other names” with strategies like “use inappropriate identity markers” or “use taboo words.”

There are many reasons behind why these social media users turn to name-calling within conflict speech, although it certainly points to polarization as a conflict strategy. As previously discussed, polarization can be described as the us-versus-them ideological positioning of the self (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2010; Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014). Once Commenter 1.1 has made it clear that they disagree with the OP, Commenter 1.2 positions themselves in opposition, not only demonstrating their support of the OP, but othering their interlocutor through the name-calling strategy. In an act of defense, Commenter 1.1 responds through a clear polarizing technique; not only does this Tumblr user directly address Commenter 1.2, but they also ideologically position themselves opposite of their interlocutor by calling them “you liberals.” These polarizing tactics connect to Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) framework of identity, as well as their relationality principle, which “emphasizes identity as a relational phenomenon” (p. 598) and claims that identity is constructed in regard to the relationship between interlocutors, particularly in relation to the similarities/differences noted during interaction. Through name-calling, these interlocutors directly address the fact that they belong to different ideological groups and ultimately strengthen their own group identity by pointing out the negative aspects of the out-group, thereby enhancing the positive aspects of the in-group. This is reminiscent of the “ideological square” proposed by Van Dijk (1987), which Jiwani and Richardson (2006) describe as “a conceptual tool [which]...is characterized by a Positive Self-Presentation and a simultaneous

Negative Other-Presentation” (p. 243). While the ideological square was originally applied to racist talk and text, certain discursive strategies, such as Commenter 1.1’s “you liberals,” applies to the kinds of referential strategies that fall under this ideological square and support the polarization between the in-group and the out-group.

Furthermore, it is interesting that Commenter 1.1 uses the phrase “you liberals” as a form of negative address. In her study examining the connection between impoliteness and polarization, Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2010) found that “a common pattern of polarization...in the corpus was the following: face attacks against candidates turn into face attacks against specific participants of the exchange, supporters of that candidate, and conclude with face attacks against the whole collective of supporters” (p. 553). The pattern of polarization discovered in Garcés-Conejos Blitvich’s study can also be observed here as Commenter 1.1 uses the term “you liberals” as an attack against not only Commenter 1.2, but as a negative address against “the whole collective supporters” (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2010, p. 553) who align with the liberal identity. Using name-calling to attack collective identities was common in this corpus and was frequently applied to the feminist social identity. Indeed, it is certainly important to note that the feminist identity was frequently attached to the liberal social identity, and this was especially apparent during instances of name-calling by the out-group. Negative addresses like “libfem” or Commenter 1.1’s “you liberals” revealed the tendency to link these two social identities together during instances of name-calling. This pattern not only marks face attacks against “the whole collective of supporters” (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2010, p. 553), but it also reflects the out-group’s negative representation of two large and active social identities within the Tumblr discourse community.

Interestingly, there were also instances of name-calling being used as a form of support between interlocutors who agree with the OP. For instance, see Example 7:



Example 7: Tumblr post

2.1: <3 love you toooooo

2.2: 🖐🖐🖐 THIS especially!!! 🖐🖐🖐

2.3: Please please please be safe, and try your best to not be alone when youre too drunk xoxo
ily **people**

2.4: Important. 🖐

2.5: Halloween is the only day when a girl can dress like a total slut, and nobody else can say anything about it. That statement goes for you too boys.

2.6: That be safe part is so critical

2.7: Seriously

2.8: There's the sexiest Storm I've ever seen at my building. 🌪️🌪️🌪️🌪️🌪️🌪️🌪️

2.9: And thank you.

2.10: I would tag my best friend, but she doesn't have Tumblr, sadly. But please be safe everyone!

2.11: Fr real though be safe

2.12: Be extra safe and mindful, Babes ♡

Example 7: Excerpt of Tumblr comments

In this example, Commenter 2.12's response is not only directed towards the OP, but to all of the Tumblr users who are participating in the discussion. Example 7 reflects one of the few posts included in the analytical corpus that does not include any clear or direct form of conflict between commenters. Because of the lack of conflict under this post, Commenter 2.12 appears to assume that all of the commenters agree and support the OP, referring to the other commenters as "Babes" and reminding them to "Be extra safe and mindful." This example of name-calling is a positive form of direct address and functions as an example of how name-calling can build the in-group's collective identity. Once again, Zappavigna and Martin's (2018) discussion surrounding communing affiliation is relevant, and they explain that communing affiliation can occur through three systems of meaning: convoking, finessing, and promoting (p. 8). In this instance, Commenter 2.12's use of the term "Babes" to refer to the entire audience is an example of convoking, which Zappavigna and Martin describe as "how a post 'calls together' a community to bond around a coupling. The term convoking (or convocation) alludes to the role that systems of address (e.g. vocatives) play for directing proposals and propositions at particular interlocutors in dialogic exchanges" (p. 8). In this sense, Commenter 2.12 convokes the community of commenters within this post, using the term "Babes" in order to "call together" the other commenters and construct the collective feminist identity.

In all, the use of name-calling within the Tumblr comments section exhibits a tendency to use direct address in order to either indicate the out-group or to commune

affiliation with the in-group. According to Culpeper (1996), “call the other names” is a positive impoliteness strategy frequently used during conflictual interactions in order to “[satisfy] the strategic ends of a superstrategy” (p. 357). Negative or offensive instances of name-calling (such as the sarcastic usage of “supergenius” or the derogatory address of “you liberals” in Example 5) were used most frequently in this corpus, with a total of 50 instances of negative name-calling noted after the data collection period. The polarizing effects that stem from negative name-calling only enhance the in-group while further marginalizing the out-group, and in turn construct social identities. In this corpus, negative name-calling was utilized by commenters who agreed with the OP and those who disagreed with the OP, meaning the feminist social identity was being constructed through these instances of name-calling, as well as other social groups that do not align with the feminist identity. Moreover, while there were fewer noted in this corpus, the positive instances of name-calling only further construct the feminist identity by communing affiliation through convoking a specific audience and building an alliance with other Tumblr users who agree with the feminist content shared by the OP.

4.2 Conflict between feminist and non-feminist users

The themes discussed in Section 4.1 served to better reveal conflictual interactions that occurred between feminist and non-feminist Tumblr users. Among all of the conflict that arose within the Tumblr comments, there were several response strategies that emerged from Tumblr users who agreed with the OP and those who did not agree with the OP. The response strategies that emerged in this analysis aligned neatly with the strategies noted in Eckert’s (2018) study. In the following sections, I will discuss these response strategies that

were commonly employed by interlocutors during instances of conflict between feminist and non-feminist Tumblr users.

4.2.1 Exposing conflict

In her study, Eckert (2018) notes that exposing abusive comments was the most frequently employed response strategy reported by the female bloggers who encountered conflict online. She explains, “Such efforts to expose online abuse show that women are attempting to proactively set boundaries on what is unacceptable online, publicly shaming abusers” (p. 1294). The results for the present study were largely the same; feminist Tumblr users regularly exposed conflictual comments and actively engaged in discourse with the user who initially left the comment. While engaging with conflictual comments is not unique to the young adult feminist group, the exposure of conflict is especially notable in this study because of how frequently it occurred within this specific context and discourse community. Out of the 30 total posts included in this study, 18 contained instances of Tumblr users exposing conflictual interactions, which can be seen in Figure 5:

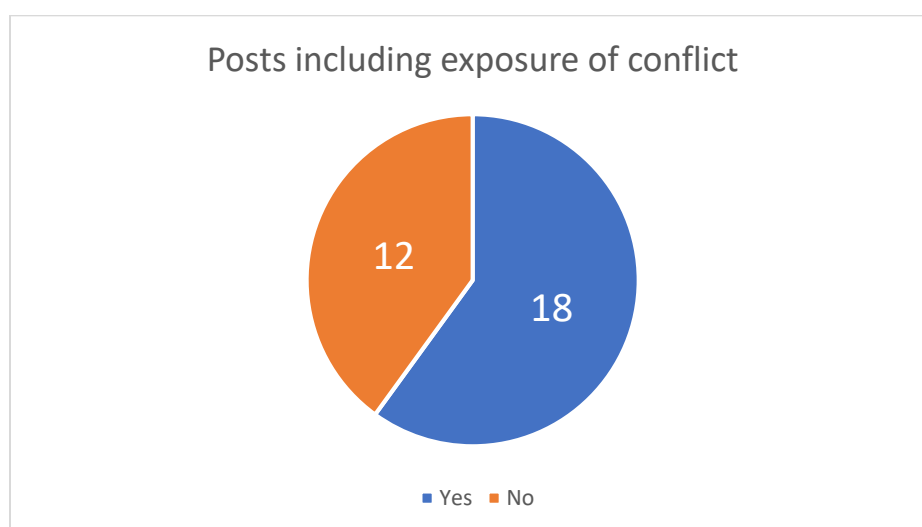
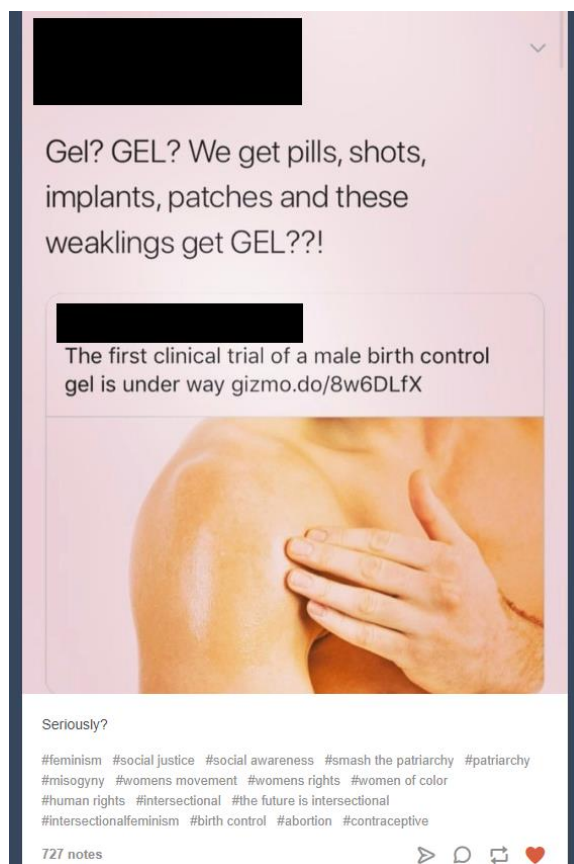


Figure 5: Posts including exposure of conflict

Based on the data in Figure 5, it is clear that over half of the posts include exposing conflict as a response strategy during conflictual interactions. In order to better understand how this strategy relates to the young adult feminist identity construction, see Example 8:



Example 8: Tumblr post

19.10: Pills are painful to use now

19.10: Why are feminists so mad men get SOMETHING going for them

19.11: @19.10 'Cause they're bigoted cunts who hate men, duh!

19.7: @19.10 yeah, why are they pissed men get something going for them? Like, higher rates of promotions, higher salaries, easy access to cheap birth control in the form of condoms, immediate respect compared to women, leadership roles, and shorter sentences in

domestic abuse cases than women exerting self defense. Weird how the privileged [*sic*] getting privilege pisses off those without it.

Example 8: Excerpt of Tumblr comments

This instance of conflict kicks off a much longer chain of conflictual turns between Commenters 19.10 and 19.7. Commenter 19.7's first comment on this post was a simple "Yes," which was intended to align this Tumblr user with the OP. Once Commenter 19.10 posted within the comments section, Commenter 19.7 responds, beginning with a sarcastic question before providing further information about why the post shared by the OP could lead to women/feminists getting "so mad." Commenter 19.7's reaction to the initial conflictual comment marks an instance of exposing what they interpret as conflict. Rather than ignoring the conflictual comment, this user instead returns to the comments section to interact with Commenter 19.10, going as far as to directly tag their interlocutor in the comment.

By exposing conflict and engaging in interactions with other users who post conflictual comments, Tumblr users who associate with the feminist social identity are able to resist patriarchal ideals or abusive comments left by those who do not align with the feminist identity. Through the social constructionist lens, exposing the conflict that occurs under a post provides feminist users with the opportunity to strengthen their collective identity because "identity is something that those involved in social activities *do*" (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014, p. 232). This in turn leads to an active construction of the feminist social identity because those who align with feminist ideals are better able to engage in polarizing tactics and, through employing these tactics, allow their identity to emerge through interactions (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Commenter 19.7 emphasizes a

polarizing us-versus-them mentality in this situation, attempting to convey the negative attributes of the out-group in comparison to the positive traits of the in-group. Furthermore, as Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2018) explains, “Conflict may not always be resolved as conflicting positions are attached to particular identities that would cease to exist if the conflictive situation ended” (p. 121). In this sense, the conflictual interaction that is occurring between Commenters 19.7 and 19.10 are necessary in order for these two interlocutors to engage in the polarizing strategies that ultimately construct their collective identities.

4.2.2 Buddy system

According to Eckert (2018), another strategy employed by the bloggers in her study was a sort of “buddy system,” which consisted of bloggers “letting friends or fellow bloggers moderate insulting comments or sharing incidents to reaffirm they are not alone” (p. 1295). In this study, using the buddy system or providing support between users who belong to the same social identities was a very common strategy. It was a frequent occurrence to find Tumblr users respond to comments that were not initially directed towards them, and this was especially relevant for feminist users who showed support to like-minded commenters when they faced conflictual responses from other users. While this is a common strategy on Tumblr, feminist Tumblr users in this study showed support for other group members with increased frequency in comparison to other discourse communities. In their study, Dobs and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2013) discuss the role of “face-threat witnesses” (p. 113) who are neither the speaker nor the hearer in an impolite interaction, but witness it as a third party. These third-party interlocutors have a range of possible choices to make when witnessing a conflictual interaction, which include refraining from responding, countering the interaction, or reacting, either through “[making] a reactive comment to heighten the drama or [reacting]

with genuine surprise to the impoliteness act” (p. 124). In this sense, the buddy system that was frequently employed in this corpus displays “face-threat witnesses” (Dobs & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2013, p. 113) who counter the conflictual interaction. Additionally, the amount of posts containing instances of the buddy system was identical to the number of comments exposing conflict. See, for instance, Figure 6:

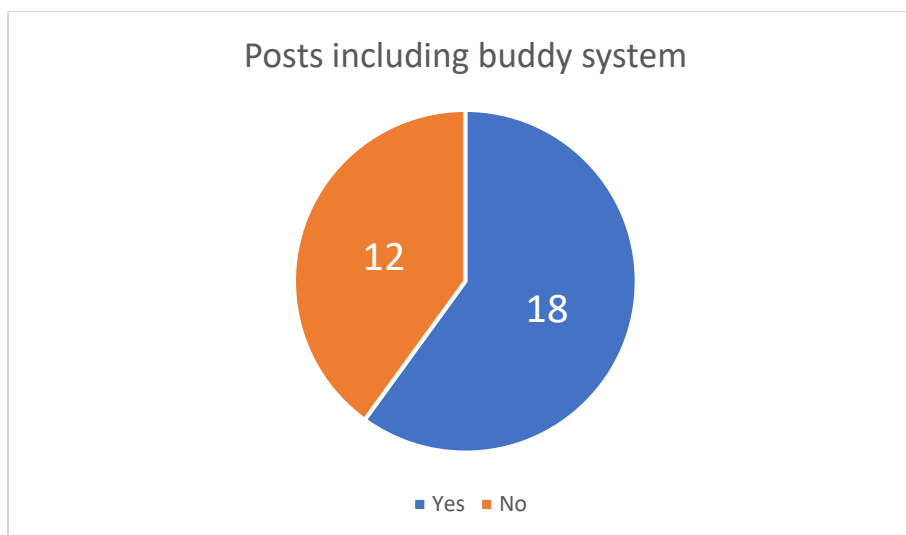


Figure 6: Posts including buddy system

It is important to point out that the nature of Tumblr’s comment feature allows for users to easily show support for other commenters. As such, the amount of comments showing support or employing a form of the “buddy system” (p. 1295) discussed by Eckert (2018) was much more frequent than it might be on another social media platform or if this study was focused on another feature of Tumblr. That being said, the abundance of comments aimed at showing support for other commenters in response to conflict is an important discursive strategy in which these Tumblr users engage. As an example, note the comments listed in Example 9:



Example 9: Tumblr post

18.1: These men take girls virginity but wants to marry someone virgin. I am so fucking done!

18.2: And so it begins. The brown hate from the feminist left has begin. You guys are a bunch of racists you know that? “All brown men are bad”? Really? Fucking terrible sort of people.

18.3: As a brown woman myself, I can assure you this post is super accurate. It what years of a patriarchal mindset, reinforced by colonial attitudes does to your country. Their sexism gets enough leeway so a Tumblr post is not going to taint the "good" ones Kay?

18.4: Both the hypocrisy and misandry of this post saddens me.

Example 9: Excerpt of Tumblr comments

In this example, we can see the buddy system being used to support the feminist in-group against the non-feminist out-group. When Commenter 18.1 posts in support of the OP,

Commenter 18.2 responds with the potentially conflictual statement lamenting that “brown hate from the feminist left has begun.” In order to support the commenter who aligned with the OP, Commenter 18.3 responds and offers personal information, including her ethnicity and gender, and dissuades Commenter 18.2 from worrying about the OP “[tainting] the ‘good’ ones.” Finally, in response to the previous comments and the OP, Commenter 18.4 adds to the conversation by noting that the OP has captured both “hypocrisy” and “misandry” within the post.

The use of the buddy system is extremely notable in the Tumblr comments section because it reflects the solidarity between feminist Tumblr users. Similar to Zappavigna and Martin’s (2017) concept of communing affiliation, the buddy system allows users of common identities and ideologies (in this case, feminism) to show support for the in-group while further othering the out-group. In addition, this solidarity in turn further helps construct the feminist collective identity through establishing unity amongst individual group members and enabling them to actively participate in performing their identity through interactions with both the in-group and the out-group.

It is also worth noting that this online buddy system frequently results in heightened conflict because the rules and norms of online public discourse are quite unique. Moreover, several users who aligned with the feminist identity used conflict speech or conflictual responses in order to support the OP or other like-minded users. As Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2010) notes, “Specific forms of incivility, such as ideologically supported hostility to others, violate the basic premises of public discourse” (p. 542). In fact, it is crucial to note that conflict was especially hostile when linked with the ideological beliefs of Tumblr users. As van Dijk (2006) explains, ideologies are “*belief systems*” that “are not individual, personal

beliefs, but social beliefs *shared* by members of *social groups*” [emphasis original] (p. 382). As such, the conflict that occurred in many of the posts included in this study were supported by a range of ideologies that were aided by the very social groups to which each Tumblr user belonged. See, for example, another excerpt of comments in response to a post discussing women’s access to birth control in Example 10:



Example 10: Tumblr post

1.1: He is a great point. You’re not entitled to healthcare, it’s not a right of life if you want good health care you have to get it yourself. It’s not the governments job to take care of you don’t want to get pregnant? Don’t have sex. Pretty easy

1.10: @1.1 Don’t have sex? Fuck that! I’ll have all the sex I want with having my contraceptives. Fuck off on what you don’t know.

Example 10: Excerpt of Tumblr comments

Several of the comments left by Commenter 1.1 were discussed earlier, but it is important to also note that after the long string of comments that Commenter 1.1 left, which

ended with “#FeminismIsBullshit #FeminismIsNotEqualRights” (see Example 3), Commenter 1.10 responds by negating the other Tumblr user’s argument, minimizing their input by claiming that they “don’t know” enough on this topic, and ultimately supporting the OP and Commenter 1.2, who was originally involved in the conflictual interchange with Commenter 1.1. In this sense, this online buddy system enables users who are members of the same social group to support one another and build a unified group, despite the fact that these interlocutors most likely have not met in real life or engaged in discussion outside of this particular post. This differentiates the use of the buddy system within Tumblr’s comments section from Eckert’s (2018) explanation of the buddy system for the bloggers in her study because the Tumblr users who belong to the feminist identity most likely would not consider themselves “friends” or commune over the fact that they are “fellow bloggers” (Eckert, 2018, p. 1295). Instead, these users support one another because they associate with the feminist group identity. Through the buddy system, these Tumblr users are able to build solidarity, support their fellow group members, and construct the feminist identity while simultaneously responding to and employing conflict speech.

4.3 Conflict among feminist users

Within this study, conflict speech was not only confined to interactions between the in-group and the out-group. As is to be expected, conflict also occurred among Tumblr users who associate with the feminist identity, in part because of the diverse nature of this group. In relating diversity to the feminist social group, it becomes clear that online environments like Tumblr allow for increased mobility of this collective identity in the sense that social media users are able to interact in online environments through a variety of mobile devices (such as cell phones). In addition, technology provides accessibility to the public discourse

surrounding the feminist identity, and a more diverse group of feminist members are able to participate in online discussions about the collective identity, leading to a more complex and unpredictable compilation of group members.

Ultimately, the diverse nature of the feminist social group brings with it a certain promise of intra-group conflict. In her study, Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2018) relates superdiversity to conflict and globalization, drawing from Blommaert (2013) while discussing how “globalization has drastically changed the way we perceive the ‘other’” (p. 122). In this sense, the increased accessibility and communication within technological innovations like the Tumblr platform have forced diverse social groups to reevaluate the out-group, and in turn, I would argue, emphasized the need to redefine the in-group as well. The remainder of this section will focus on the response strategies that feminist group members used when conflict occurred with another group member.

4.3.1 Conflict over defining feminism

Because of the changing nature and multiple distinct movements of feminism, it seems natural to expect disagreement over how to define feminism between members belonging to this diverse social group. In addition, conflict between group members is also likely to occur online due to the ease with which Tumblr comments allow social media users to contribute to the public discourse. Feminism is currently in the midst of a newer fourth wave, which “works with the understanding that intersectionality is the common thread between the different communities and groups that link under the term ‘feminism’” (Looft, 2017, p. 894) and relies heavily on social media platforms like Tumblr to connect group members across vast physical spaces. Again, intersectionality is important to keep in mind when discussing the fourth wave of feminism because it focuses on systems of gender, race,

sexuality, nationality, and class “mutually construct one another” (Collins, 1998, p. 63) rather than existing in separate spheres.

With this in mind, the comments section on Tumblr provides a unique opportunity for feminist members to interact with one another and, through the conflict that occurs between members in regard to the multiple existing definitions of feminism, these interactions also contribute to the construction of the larger feminist identity. Example 11 stands as an example of disagreement over how to define feminism.



Example 11: Tumblr post

10.1: Like clockwork, every bullshit issue feminism pulls out of its ass and relentlessly is ridiculed for gets labeled as “white” about a month afterwards. And bonus points for suddenly caring about issues anti feminists have been bringing up for years.

10.2: Is ‘circumcision’ male genital mutilation?

10.3: Feminism es just White Women wanting their cut off of the White man’s take

10.4: We can't care about both? I won't stop until all genders are equal and so yes that does involve me caring about random ass items being unnecessarily gendered. That doesn't stop me from caring about genital mutilation? I don't.. I don't see how it could? In anyway?

10.5: THIS 🤔

10.6: @OP I'm very disappointed. That's not what "white feminism" is, and adding racism and anti-white rhetoric to the issues we already have is not the inclusion, acceptance, and intersectionality you claim to have on your blog.

Example 11: Excerpt of Tumblr comments

This excerpt deals specifically with "white feminism," which describes the exclusion and marginalization that minorities and women of color have endured in the larger feminist discussion. Ferreday (2017) discusses white feminism, explaining that "the notion of white feminism, arising from digital activist and fan spaces, draws attention to the ways in which feminist accounts of the politics of popular culture marginalise black women's experience" (p. 271-272). Particularly in the fourth wave of feminism, which emphasizes intersectionality and the inclusion of minorities in the dominant discourse, the topic of white feminism has become more prominent in the current feminist discussion than it was during previous waves. Again, intersectionality can be described as an inclusion of several "systems of oppression" such as race, age, gender, sexuality, and class, and an emphasis on "how these systems mutually construct one another" (Collins, 1998, p. 63). However, as depicted in Example 11, many feminist group members remain uncomfortable with topics like white feminism and resist it as valid or necessary to acknowledge.

In Example 11, the comments responding to the OP vary, beginning with Commenter 10.1, who dismisses white feminism as a "bullshit issue" before aligning with "anti

feminists.” In this comment, Commenter 10.1 combines the impoliteness strategies of “use taboo words” and “condescend, scorn or ridicule” (Culpeper, 1996) in order to align opposite the OP. This commenter is not alone in their stance, as Commenters 10.2 and 10.3 also firmly position themselves against the OP. However, Commenters 10.4 and 10.6 retain a more complicated positioning in regard to the OP, as they both appear to align with the feminist social identity but disagree with the OP’s take on white feminism. Commenter 10.4 asks the question, “We can’t care about both?” Meanwhile, Commenter 10.6 directly tags the OP before utilizing the strategy “be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic” (Culpeper, 1996) to blatantly dismiss the post, claiming “That’s not what ‘white feminism’ is” and asserting that the OP’s “racism and anti-white rhetoric” only cause further division rather than encouraging the intersectionality of the fourth wave of feminism.

In dismissing the validity or definition of white feminism, Commenters 10.4 and 10.6 are ultimately disagreeing with the OP over the definition of feminism as a whole. This is especially crucial because of the marginalization of many young adult feminists from the dominant feminist discourse. However, the rise of social media has allowed these traditionally excluded feminist voices to be heard more easily, as is the case with the OP in Example 10. While Commenters 10.4 and 10.6 disagree over the topic of white feminism, they are engaging in interactions with the OP, other commenters, and readers of this particular post. If we are to accept the belief that identity occurs through interaction (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), these kinds of conflictual interactions and disagreements, uncomfortable as they may be to some feminists, are continuously impacting the larger feminist social identity by encouraging group members to interactionally define what it means to align with the feminist group.

Additionally, the data collected for this study also noted evidence of Tumblr users disagreeing over what should be considered a “feminist” issue. While feminism is typically thought of as an issue of gender equality, there are feminist group members who also extend feminist issues to those dealing with race, sexuality, and political equality. Moreover, the feminist Tumblr profiles included in this study frequently share posts that address issues such as gun laws, institutional racism, or LGBTQ rights. As a result, there are several comments within in this corpus that contain conflict between Tumblr users aligning with the feminist identity because they disagreed about whether a topic was a “feminist” issue or not. For example, see Example 12:



Example 12: Tumblr post

14.1: This isn't feminism

14.2: @14.1 yeah I'm confused why this is in the feminism tag tbh

14.3: Oml

14.4: Guys

14.5: Are you okay??????? Hello?

14.5: Like emotionally because this is not the memes we should be normalizing. This is so fucked up.

14.6: Oh stfu the majority of you have never been in a school shooting..

14.7: fUCK

14.8: THIS SHOULD NOT BE NORMAL!! DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS AMERICA!!!!

14.9: I'm online schooled now, but my old school would get a bomb threat or shooting threat at least once a month. This shit isn't a joke .

14.10: those tags make me wanna blow my brains out holy shit

14.11: you all think this is funny but consider travelling into a foreign country and then receiving the news that you, may, die, before, returning to your own

14.12: 😏😏😏😏

Example 12: Excerpt of Tumblr comments

In this example, the OP addresses school shootings which, at the time of data collection, were a very common topic to encounter in many discourse communities on Tumblr. However, on this particular post, there are a variety of different reactions to the OP. Several of the commenters appear to interpret the OP as if it is providing commentary on gun control and gun rights in America, while others accuse the OP of making light of a serious issue. For the purposes of this study, the most important comments are the first two shown in this excerpt.

Commenter 14.1 responds to the OP by directly stating that this topic “isn’t feminism.” Commenter 14.2 then adds to conversation by agreeing, and questioning “why this is in the feminism tag.” While Commenter 14.1 seems to deny the entire issue of gun control as one pertaining to feminism, Commenter 14.2’s response questions the OP using the hashtag #feminism on this post. Within the Tumblr community, there are profiles who tag posts using a range of hashtags, regardless of whether they actually relate to the post or not. While Tumblr’s “Community Guidelines” page discourages users from overusing hashtags that are not relevant to the content of the post, this remains a common practice and it appears that Commenter 14.2 is addressing the OP’s use of this practice and assuming that the issue of school shootings is not related to feminism. In their comments, both of these Tumblr users are employing the impoliteness strategy “seek disagreement” (Culpeper, 1996) in order to establish their misalignment with the views of the OP.

As feminism evolves through its current fourth wave, it is likely that feminist group members will continue to disagree over whether a topic is specifically a feminist issue, an issue that should be viewed through a feminist lens, or whether it is altogether unrelated to feminism. Through features like Tumblr’s comment section, feminist group members are able to contribute to the dominant public discourse and discuss these issues with one another. While conflict is inevitable, it is worth repeating that conflict is “not inherently negative, as it can be used to build communal life” (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2018, p. 121). In this sense, conflict and disagreement over how to appropriately define feminism and what to include under the umbrella of feminism are to be expected within a diverse social identity. In keeping with Culpeper’s (1996) and Culpeper et. al’s (2003) discussions of impoliteness, the use of several of the strategies mentioned earlier (such as “seek disagreement” or “condescend,

scorn or ridicule”) aid Tumblr users in achieving the superstrategies like sarcasm or withholding politeness altogether (Culpeper, 1996, p. 356-357). In addition, through these conflictual interactions and the strategies imposed, the feminist identity is continuously being constructed by its own members, both influencing and being influenced by those who make up this identity.

4.3.2 Selective dissociation

Because the feminist social identity is incredibly diverse, the conflictual interactions between group members result in interlocutors employing a range of discursive strategies in order to navigate interactions. One of these strategies is selective dissociation or, as Garcia-Bedolla (2003) describes it, “the selective distancing of themselves away from the sectors of community that they see as to blame for this negative attribution” (p. 266). In this sense, selective dissociation represents group members’ attempts to improve the perception of the group as a whole while pushing away those who do not represent the group in a positive light. The issue with this strategy in a diverse group, however, remains that what one group member sees as a “negative attribution” (Garcia-Bedolla, 2003, p. 266) might not be seen as an issue for another group member. As such, the need for selective dissociation becomes entirely subjective within an increasingly diverse group, and this is especially noticeable in an online platform like Tumblr, where each group member has an equal platform to vocalize their beliefs. As an example, see Example 13:



Example 13: Tumblr post

1.27: So many people are reblogging this listing other uses and like... that's not the point. Of course people use it for other reasons! And your use of it to control your unusually awful, painful periods, or to reduce your preexisting risk of ovarian cysts should absolutely be protected and easily accessible and all the rest of it. But we shouldn't have to talk about painful periods and ovarian cysts to make bc accessible! Not wanting to be pregnant, wanting full control of your body, should be...

Example 13: Excerpt of Tumblr comments

In this excerpt, Commenter 1.27's response occurs amidst a long and heated debate over the use of and access to birth control and Viagra. While many commenters supported the OP's belief that Viagra is nothing more than a sexual aid, a large number of commenters pointed out that Viagra is also frequently prescribed as a heart medication. However, amidst the debate over the use of Viagra, Commenter 1.27 points out their belief that this focus is "not the point" of the OP. This commenter goes on to state that the "point" of the OP is that,

while there exists a range of reasons why a person might use birth control, avoiding pregnancy is just as valid a reason for the medication. While this comment does not appear to be actively seeking disagreement, it does contradict several of the other comments left by feminist group members and has a high likelihood of being interpreted as conflictual. Because of Commenter 1.27's resistance against fellow group members' comments, this comment can be interpreted as a selective dissociation from those who this commenter feels are not presenting the feminist perspective in a positive light.

In her study, Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2018) discusses the functionality of selective dissociation within a superdiverse social group. Garcés-Conejos Blitvich discovered a four-part pattern of conflict speech usage that emerged while studying the superdiverse Latino identity. The parts of this pattern are as follows:

Part 1: Somebody/their actions/their thoughts, etc. would be associated with a negative aspect.

Part 2: By pointing out this negative aspect, the poster would try to make the addressee feel uncomfortable.

Part 3: By disagreeing with that person/action/thought, the poster would indicate a lack of common ground.

Part 4: The poster would then finally dissociate themselves from that person or group. (p. 130)

The example shown in Example 13 reflects this four-part pattern, although I would argue that it deviates slightly in Part 3 of the pattern. Commenter 1.27 responds to “[so] many people” who are not focused on what s/he believes is “the point” of the OP, which is directly associating the other comments with a negative (or, at least, misguided) aspect of the feminist

discussion. In turn, Commenter 1.27 attempts to make these other commenters feel uncomfortable by dismissing their contributions to the conversation, claiming that they are unrelated entirely to the topic at hand. In doing this, I believe that Commenter 1.27 dissociates from those who are not focused on “the point” of the conversation initiated by the OP. However, in this example, it appears that Commenter 1.27 alters Part 3, at least partially. While Commenter 1.27 does “indicate a lack of common ground” (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2018, p. 130), s/he also attempts to persuade other feminist Tumblr users to accept and understand what “the point” of this discussion should be. In this sense, the selective dissociation shown by Commenter 1.27 represents the “selective distancing of themselves away from the sectors of community that they see as to blame for this negative attribution” (Garcia-Bedolla, 2003, p. 266), but this commenter is also hoping to alter the viewpoints of fellow group members. Thus, this form of selective dissociation is an attempt to improve the overall perception of the collective group, but it is also aimed at improving specific group members as well.

Additionally, it is important to point out that selective dissociation is not unique to the feminist social group. In fact, the data included in this corpus showed an increased amount of selective dissociation within the out-group (those whose comments do not align with the OP) than it did for the feminist in-group. As an example, see Example 14:



Example 14: Tumblr post

17.1: I see no lies

17.2: I see those posts I feel like apologizing for the closest women. Sorry to all the females out there. You are great and we don't deserve you.

17.3: Leave him sis

17.4: Not all men are like this. But definitely the loudest.

17.5: When did this conversation take place?

17.6: Yep

17.7: Thanks for saying it

17.5: You must've gone out with a thug in your poor taste. You must've also voted for Obama and Hillary with that same poor judgment.

Example 14: Excerpt of Tumblr comments

In this example, we can see a variety of responses to the OP, although I am specifically concerned with the responses left by Commenters 17.4 and 17.5. These two

commenters use different approaches in their responses, although both result in disagreement with the OP. Commenter 17.4, for example, uses the phrase “Not all men,” which is frequently used in the dominant discourse to minimize the blame put on men for patriarchal or misogynistic behavior. However, Commenter 17.4 goes on to agree that “the loudest” men are responsible for the behavior discussed in the OP. Through this response, Commenter 17.4 uses selective dissociation in order to create distance between “the loudest” men who negatively represent the male social identity and the rest of the group. This comment will likely be interpreted by other members of the out-group because it employs the impoliteness strategy “dissociate from the other” which involves “[denying] association or common ground with the other” (Culpeper, 1996, p. 357). However, this use of selective dissociation differs from the example shown in Example 14 because Commenter 17.4’s response is intended only to create distance from those negatively representing the male social group, to improve the perception of the group as a whole, rather than improving the individual members who are not representing the group positively.

Commenter 17.5’s responses are also worth noting because they represent an entirely different use of selective dissociation. I am particularly interested in the second comment posted by Commenter 17.5, which blames women who have “gone out with a thug in your poor taste” instead of blaming the men exhibiting the behavior discussed in the OP. Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2014) discovered this as well in their study, explaining:

A frequent line of argument found in the corpus was to blame women who had been abused by their partners for choosing the wrong kind of man. Several

Youtubers...argued that women should not complain about being abused since...they

got what they deserved for choosing the aggressive macho type rather than a boring, but peaceful man. (p. 240)

Commenter 17.5's response aligns neatly with the findings of Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2014) and represents a clear decision to place blame on women for their "poor judgement" instead of questioning why the members of the male social group act in what others perceive to be a negative representation of the larger collective group.

Interestingly, Commenter 17.5 also extends the "poor taste" that s/he associates with the female social group to decisions regarding political affiliation. In this sense, the out-group, according to Commenter 17.5, is women "who are described as masochistic and lacking common sense" (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014, p. 240) but this comment also merges the out-group with the Democratic party, similarly to the name-calling tactics that were discussed in the Section 4.1.3. While this comment enlarges the out-group, it represents an attempt to narrow down the in-group according to Commenter 17.5, and ultimately strengthen the in-group's identity.

In this corpus, selective dissociation was a common occurrence because of the diverse nature of the feminist social group and the availability to the public discourse that the Tumblr comments section allows to any single member of a social group. Because any Tumblr user has the ability to insert their voice into the public discussions surrounding a post, members of a diverse social group will inevitably come into contact with group members who they believe do not represent the group in a positive light. In the data collected in this corpus, it becomes apparent that the goal of selective dissociation can differ depending on the social group. As shown in Example 13, Commenter 1.27's use of selective dissociation was intended to further strengthen the entire social group while altering the negative opinions or

beliefs of specific group members. However, Commenter 17.4's response in Example 14 aimed solely to marginalize members of the male social group who were not representing the group positively. While both of these uses of selective dissociation build and strengthen larger collective identities, the relationship between those engaging in selective dissociation and those who are being pushed farther away from the group has the potential to differ dramatically.

Through examining the conflictual interactions that occur between Tumblr users associating with the feminist social identity, it becomes clear that the diverse within this group leads to inevitable disagreements over the very nature of feminism. Whether this conflict occurs in regard to the definition of feminism and feminist topics or as a result of group members selectively dissociating from those who are not representing the group positively, feminist Tumblr users are still able to negotiate their collective identity through interacting with other group members. As Bucholtz and Hall (2005) explain, identity is "intersubjectively rather than individually produced and interactionally emergent rather than assigned in an a priori fashion" (p. 587). In this sense, the conflictual interactions that occur between feminist group members reflect active construction of the feminist identity through constant negotiation of what it means to "be" a feminist. The following chapter will continue to discuss these implications and the conclusions drawn from this study.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

This analysis and discussion unveil the results of my ethnographic study of the young adult feminist social group. As stated in Chapter 3, an ethnography aims to “make sense of the specific culture in order to better understand members’ behaviors, actions, and beliefs” (Bishop, 1999 as cited in Dich, 2016). By focusing on the role of conflict speech within the comments discussed in this analysis, a number of patterns have emerged that I believe contribute to a better understanding of the cultural values of the young adult feminist social identity. Section 5.1 will discuss this ethnography and connect it to the analysis from the previous chapter. The following sections will return to the research questions proposed in Chapter 2 and discuss the results of this study and its implications for these questions.

5.1 Ethnography

During the analysis, it has become clear that there exists a distinct difference in the functionality of conflict speech between feminist and non-feminist Tumblr users in comparison to the conflict that occurs between two or more feminist users. In linking the usage of hashtags, instances of name-calling, and the reasoning behind selective dissociation that were discussed in earlier sections, a common goal appears that is consistently emphasized within the young adult feminist culture: solidarity. Despite the conflict that occurs between multiple feminist users, the majority of the conflictual interactions brought with them the objective of reaching an understanding between the feminist group members. This is reminiscent of how Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2018) defines conflict, reminding us that “conflict involves some measure of different positionings and is not inherently negative, as it can be used to build communal life” (p. 121). When conflict occurs between two feminist Tumblr users, the outcome of the interaction tends to be some form of increased

solidarity, whether it be between the two users as feminists or a single user's relation to the entire collective identity. In turn, this emphasis on solidarity provides innumerable opportunities for the construction of the feminist identity.

In addition, it is also crucial to once again point out the importance of the fourth wave of feminism for this particular study. Because the fourth wave began in 2008 (Looft, 2017), the majority of young adult Tumblr users have established their feminist group membership in the midst of the “reliance and usage of technology and social media to connect and reach populations across cultural and national borders” (Looft, 2017, p. 894) that is attributed to this fourth wave. This reliance on technology can explain why there is such an emphasis placed on constructing the feminist social identity within the comments section on Tumblr. Moreover, the increased importance that the young adult feminist group places on solidarity also reflects the significance of intersectionality within the fourth wave (Looft, 2017). Example 11 in Section 4.3.1 provides an example of how conflict speech can aim to improve intersectionality (whether this improvement is immediately apparent or not). In addition, conflictual discussions surrounding intersectional issues like white feminism provide opportunities for feminist group members to build the collective feminist identity through forcing group members to acknowledge the diverse nature of their own social group.

Finally, the theme of solidarity between young adult feminist Tumblr users can also be seen during conflictual interactions with non-feminist Tumblr users. Specifically, the consistent reliance on the buddy system and the willingness to engage with conflictual comments serves as a reminder that feminist Tumblr users are not likely to ignore conflict, regardless of whether it is directed at themselves or towards another member of the feminist group. Instead, feminist Tumblr users tend to embrace conflictual interactions and use the

conflict in order to strengthen their collective identity. These users also frequently relied on polarization when they engaged in conflict speech with non-feminist users. These polarizing tactics included emphasizing the positive aspects of the feminist identity while pointing out the negative traits of the non-feminist out-group. Most frequently, feminist commenters minimized the comments of the non-feminist out-group by emphasizing the out-group's lack of lived experiences as a negative attribute. Commenter 16.14's comment in Example 2 serves as a prime example of this polarizing minimization, which claims that the majority of non-feminist Tumblr users "don't get it."

Overall, the aim to carry out an ethnography of the young adult feminist social group resulted in finding a single cultural value that penetrates almost every other aspect of conflictual interactions. In the comments left underneath the Tumblr posts included in this study, users consistently emphasized the importance of solidarity during conflict between feminists and non-feminists, as well as an attempt to achieve unity and build community between feminists engaged in conflict. I believe that the findings of this study prove that one of the main goals for the young adult feminist collective identity is to establish solidarity and intersectionality within a diverse group. Within an online environment like Tumblr, feminist users are able to build and strengthen their collective identity while working to achieve solidarity through engaging in conflict with the out-group, as well as with one another.

5.2 What role does online conflict speech play in young adult feminist identity construction?

A combination of theories was employed in order to understand the functionality of conflict speech during interactions and connect this conflict with online identity construction. Through a social constructionist approach, Culpeper's (1996) framework for impoliteness

and the modifications to this framework (Culpeper et. al (2003); Culpeper (2016)), as well as Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) view of identity as interactional allowed for a better understanding of the conflict that ensued within the analytical corpus of this study.

Using these theoretical frameworks, I conclude that conflict plays a multifunctional role within online discourse. Indeed, it is true that, for example, the conflict occurring as a result of "trolling" greatly differs from the conflict that occurred between two feminist Tumblr users because Tumblr users understand that trolls intend to cause disruption (Eckert, 2018; Hardaker, 2013) whereas conflict that occurs between two feminist users is aimed towards achieving unity. However, in connecting conflict to the identity construction of the young adult feminist identity, the findings from this study provide insight into how young adult feminists on Tumblr approach conflictual interactions and how these interactions construct the collective feminist identity. Overall, this study found that conflictual interactions play a role in the young adult feminist identity construction because instances of conflict allow Tumblr users to *perform* their identity through interaction, particularly through polarizing tactics that emphasize the positive attributes of the in-group while highlighting the negative aspects of the out-group. Through instances of conflict speech, young adult feminist Tumblr users were able to speak for the collective group.

To conclude, the role of conflict speech within online identity construction is much like other forms of discourse. As Bucholtz and Hall (2005) state, identity is "interactionally emergent rather than assigned in an a priori fashion" (p. 587) and, as such, identity emerges and is constructed through interactions that occur online. What sets conflict speech apart from other forms of interaction, however, is that conflictual interactions typically emphasize the in-group/out-group dynamic that is imperative for social identities. In order for identities

to function, there must be another, an “other,” with which we are able to interact.

Additionally, conflictual interactions also allow members of the in-group to construct their collective identity through selective dissociation from group members who are not positively representing the collective group. Instances of conflict provided the Tumblr users in this study the chance to directly interact with the out-group, negotiate group values and membership with the in-group and, through these instances of conflict, further strengthen the young adult feminist identity.

5.3 How do instances of conflict between two or more feminists impact identity construction?

The corpus of this study revealed a significant amount of conflict between Tumblr users who aligned with the feminist identity. Some of the conflict speech occurred between two or more commenters under a post, and other conflictual interactions left in the comments of a post were directed towards the feminist profiles themselves. Through the ethnography that was established in Section 5.1, I determined that establishing a sense of unity in a diverse social identity was the goal of many of the conflictual interactions that occurred between two or more feminist Tumblr users. The instances of conflict speech within the analytical corpus allowed Tumblr users who aligned with the feminist identity to discuss what it means to “be” a feminist. This is especially important in regard to Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) view of identity as “interactionally emergent” (p. 587) because the feminist identity emerges even as feminist Tumblr users engage in conflict speech while discussing the definition of feminism.

Once again, it is imperative that we understand the functionality of conflict between two or more young adult feminist Tumblr users because of the recent fourth wave of feminism and its emphasis on intersectionality. Through engaging in conflict speech with

another group member, feminist Tumblr users were able to strengthen their collective identity through attempting to achieve some form of unity or agreement over the definition of feminism in the midst of the new fourth wave. While conflict can frequently be viewed as divisive, the findings of this study reveal that young adult feminists use conflict in digital environments in the attempt to “build communal life” (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2018, p. 121) and establish common ground with other group members.

5.4 How do instances of conflict between at least one feminist and at least one non-feminist impact identity construction?

Finally, this study also found a significant amount of conflict between Tumblr users who aligned with the feminist identity and those who did not align with the feminist identity. Within the context of the posts included in this study, it quickly became apparent that the users who aligned with the feminist identity were the in-group, while those who did not agree with the OP were viewed as the out-group. However, because of the affordances of online social platforms like Tumblr, the out-group had equal speaking power in comparison to the in-group, which resulted in an increased amount of conflict in relation to the feminist identity.

However, the findings of this study revealed that the feminist in-group did not hesitate to engage in conflictual interactions with the out-group. Instead, utilizing the buddy system and directly exposing the conflict allowed feminist Tumblr users to maintain control over the situation. Culpeper’s (1996) framework of impoliteness was particularly important when analyzing instances of conflict between the in-group and the out-group because Culpeper relates instances of impoliteness to the power structure between interlocutors. In this sense, analyzing conflict between the in-group and the out-group provides unique insight

into the role that conflict plays as a method of establishing and maintaining power during conflictual interactions.

The feminist identity group is extremely active within the Tumblr discourse community, and yet many feminists have different views regarding what the feminist identity entails. The four feminist Tumblr accounts that were the centerpiece for this study provided a unique environment where conflict served several purposes including exposing conflict introduced by the out-group, polarization, and selectively dissociating from group members who negatively represented the in-group. However, all of these instances of conflict related to the construction of the feminist identity through interaction. By engaging in conflict speech, young adult feminists are better able to establish commonality and strengthen an understanding of the in-group in an effort to achieve a unified feminist group within the Tumblr discourse community.

This study has aimed to better understand the functionality of conflict speech during the construction of the young adult feminist identity. Through the thematic and discourse analysis discussed in Chapter 4, several common themes and conflict strategies were revealed that better situate the role of conflict within online discourse. Additionally, the comments included in this study reflected constant negotiation of the feminist identity through interaction on the part of the feminist in-group. One thing is certainly clear – feminism is continuously evolving (as can be seen in the recent fourth wave) and this evolution demands further research in regard to the feminist social identity. Through social media platforms like Tumblr, the feminist social group has become increasingly diverse and technology is allowing for communication between feminists of various racial, cultural, economic, and geographical backgrounds. As young adult feminists continue to age and the

feminist social group evolves further, continuous research is necessary in order to understand how members of this diverse social group navigate interactions with the out-group, while simultaneously negotiating and striving to achieve unity with their fellow group members.

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APPENDIX A: CULPEPER'S (1996) TAXONOMY OF IMPOLITENESS STRATEGIES

Five impoliteness superstrategies:

(1) *Bald on record impoliteness*

(2) *Positive impoliteness*

(3) *Negative impoliteness*

(4) *Sarcasm or mock politeness*

(5) *Withhold politeness*

Positive impoliteness output strategies:

Ignore, snub the other - fail to acknowledge the other's presence.

Exclude the other from an activity

Disassociate from the other - for example, deny association or common ground with the other; avoid sitting together.

Be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic

Use inappropriate identity markers - for example, use title and surname when a close relationship pertains, or a nickname when a distant relationship pertains.

Use obscure or secretive language - for example, mystify the other with jargon, or use a code known to others in the group, but not the target.

Seek disagreement - select a sensitive topic.

Make the other feel uncomfortable - for example, do not avoid silence, 7 joke, or use small talk. *Use taboo words* - swear, or use abusive or profane language.

Call the other names - use derogatory nominations. etc.

Negative impoliteness output strategies:

Frighten - instill a belief that action detrimental to the other will occur.

Condescend, scorn or ridicule - emphasize your relative power. Be contemptuous. Do not treat the other seriously. Belittle the other (e.g. use diminutives).

Invade the other's space - literally (e.g. position yourself closer to the other than the relationship permits) or metaphorically (e.g. ask for or speak about information which is too intimate given the relationship).

Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect - personalize, use the pronouns 'I' and 'you'.

Put the other's indebtedness on record

APPENDIX B: CULPEPER'S (2016) BOTTOM-UP MODEL OF IMPOLITENESS STRATEGIES

